

King Crispin and the Cordiners

*Rise Crispin! follow where your shopmates lead,
To view our king illustrious king indeed!*¹

David Service (1776–1828) had first-hand experience of the cordiner (shoemaker) initiation rites he described in his poem ‘Crispin or the Apprentice Boy’, having himself learned the gentle craft. His contemporaries knew well that a Crispin or a ‘son of Crispin’ was a shoemaker and that the gentle craft indicated shoemaking; these terms continued to be used until at least the early twentieth century. Far less certain is the awareness among eighteenth-century urban dwellers of the origins of the terminology or the longevity of the shoemakers’ attachment to their patron saint Crispin now designated a king. By 1820 when a grand procession of King Crispin and his retinue perambulated the streets of Edinburgh on St Crispin’s Day, 25 October, the authors of the advertisement poster felt it necessary to give a synopsis of the legends associated with St Crispin and his brother St Crispianus for potential spectators.²

The cult of the brothers Crispin and Crispianus, Roman Christians of the third century who sought refuge in Soissons in France where they practiced shoemaking before being martyred, dates at least to the sixth century.³ In 1379 the shoemakers of Paris established a confraternity ‘en l’honneur de Saint Crépin et Saint Crépinien dans l’église Notre Dame de Paris’; followed by similar groups in Saumur, Troyes and Pesmes, with plays about the saints being performed in Aix-en Provence (1443) and in Compiègne (1488).⁴ In other medieval European states shoemakers commissioned artworks such as the carved door flanked by the patron saints bearing their shoemakers’ knives (1470) and painting by F. Pourbus (1570–1622) in their chapel in the church of St Salvator in Bruges.⁵ In which historical period Scottish cordiners adopted the saint and his brother Crispianus as their spiritual protectors is unknown, but their celebration must have been well established by the early sixteenth century as King James IV of Scotland made

¹ David Service, ‘Crispin or The Apprentice Boy’ in *The Wild harp’s murmurs, or Rustic strains* (London, 1806), p. 80.

² National Library of Scotland, LC 1268, Broadside entitled ‘King Crispin’, 1820.

³ Geoffrey of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London, 1974), p. 298.

⁴ Elisabeth Lalou, ‘Les cordonniers metteure en scène des mystères de saint Crépin et saint Crépinien’, *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes*, tome 143 (1985), pp.104–5, 104.

⁵⁵ Grant Allen, *Belgium: Its Cities* (Boston, 1903), p. 103.

offerings of forty shillings for 'bred' and 'lichts' for 'Saints Crispine and Crispianes' on 25 October 1506 and 23 October 1507.⁶

The earliest dated mention of a shoemakers' altar to Crispin and Crispianus comes from a description of the Seal of Cause granted by the Town Council of Edinburgh to the cordiners on 28 July 1449. Each master of the trade who kept a booth within the town was to pay one penny Scots and their servants one halfpenny, towards the support of their altar of St Crispin and Crispianus in St Giles church. There is no extant document to verify Maitland's citation of 1753 but subsequent Seals of Cause dated 4 February 1509/10 and 17 September 1533 are documented.⁷ Other crafts such as the hammermen, tailors, and baxters also maintained altars to their patron saints within St Giles, as did those in burghs like Aberdeen and Perth. Celebrations of their patrons on the relevant days confirmed a sense of identity for the members of these guilds or incorporations and provided the opportunities for ceremonial display, feasting and drinking witnessed in towns all over Europe. The performance of saints plays and enactments of biblical stories where the various crafts undertook portrayal of specified scenes — the enactment of the 'Messayagour' and 'Moyses' by the Aberdeen cordiners in 1442, for example — added color to the medieval town; and jockeying for position in processions such those for the Corpus Christi festivals was fierce and contentious.⁸

The religious Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century abolished the commemoration of saints and upkeep of their altars but customs and traditions of the craft guilds and the ordinary people persisted into the seventeenth century in both England and Scotland. Repeated actions by Presbyterian kirk sessions and presbyteries attempted to suppress pilgrimages to sacred wells, midsummer bonfires, football, and Yule carols in Elgin, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Stirling, and Glasgow; and in Aberdeen cordiners, websters, tailors, and baxters maintained holy day processions, saint days, festivities and rituals throughout the 1560s and 1570s, although there are no references to St Crispin.⁹ There are none either in the minutes of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh or the Canongate, but these records deal with the organizational and technical

⁶ Sir James Balfour Paul, ed., *Accounts of the Lord Treasurer of Scotland*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1901), p. 284; *Accounts*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh 1902), p. 36.

⁷ William Maitland, *The History of Edinburgh, from its foundation to the present time, Book IV* (Edinburgh, 1753), p. 305; James Marwick, ed., *Extracts from the Burgh Records of Edinburgh*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1869), p. 127; vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1871), p. 65.

⁸ Ebenezer Bain, *Merchant and Crafts Guilds A History of the Aberdeen Incorporation of Trades* (Aberdeen, 1887), p. 49.

⁹ Margo Todd, 'Profane Pastimes and the Reformed Community: The Persistence of Popular Festivals in Early Modern Scotland', *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2 (April, 2000), pp.123–156.

regulation of the craft. There is evidence, however, that the conviviality associated with medieval guilds continued. An Act of the Incorporation of the Cordiners of the Canongate in 1610 attempted to curb excessive drinking but had to be reiterated in 1648. It was followed the next year by the ending of the custom of making entrants pay for a dinner to the craft, though the custom of a master providing drink for the registration of apprentices continued.¹⁰ Stirling cordiners decreed in 1698 that there was to be no spending either for meat or drink 'except their portions of the yearly dinner'.¹¹ In Perth, however, in 1679 the entry money for the cordiner craft — after completion of apprenticeship — included £8 Scots for a football and a dinner for the masters was expected.¹² Almost 100 years later the Incorporation of Cordiners demonstrated knowledge of the Crispin tradition by claiming its right of seats in St John's East Church where its altar had been 'from time immemorial'.¹³

While there is, to date, no evidence of how the cordiners continued to revere or celebrate St Crispin before the eighteenth century, in England the legends of the two brothers received a spectacular re-working in 1597 by Thomas Deloney in his *The History of the Gentle Craft*.¹⁴ The first of his stories, however, dealt with Sir or St Hugh and St Winifred, fusing aspects of the account of St Winfred of Holywell with elements from the life of the Welsh St Keyna and possibly echoes of pagan mythical figures, although St Hugh was a Deloney creation who bequeathed his bones to shoemakers thereby accounting for the epithet 'St Hugh's bones' for shoemaker's tools. The second story recounted the adventures of Crispin and Crispianus transformed into British princes disguised as shoemakers in third-century Kent. While Crispin secretly married the daughter of the Emperor Maximinus, Crispianus achieved glory fighting against the Persian shoemaker General Iphicrates, who declared that a 'Shoemakers son is a Prince born'.¹⁵ After much subterfuge involving shoemakers the story culminated in the acknowledgment of the marriage and recognition of Crispin's newborn son:

And ever after upon that day at night, the shoemakers make great cheare and feasting, in remembrance of these two princely brethren: and because it might not be forgotten they caused

¹⁰ C. A. Malcolm, 'Incorporation of Cordiners of the Canongate, 1538–1773', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, XVIII (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 130; National Records of Scotland, GD1/14/1, *Minute Book of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Canongate, 1584–1852*.

¹¹ David B. Morris, *The Incorporation of Shoemakers of Stirling*, (Stirling, 1925), p. 32.

¹² Peter Baxter, ed., *The Shoemaker Incorporation of Perth 1545–1927* (Perth, 1927), p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁴ Thomas Deloney, *The Gentle Craft*, ed. Simon Barker (Aldershot, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

their names to be placed in the kalendar for a yeerly remembrance, which you will find in the moneth of October about three dayes before the feast of Simon and Jude.¹⁶

The third tale charted the rise of Simon Eyre, in reality a draper, to the position of Lord Mayor of London (1445); and provided material for Thomas Dekker's long-lasting play *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599). Many of Deloney's characters were to re-emerge in the eighteenth-and-nineteenth century processions of the shoemakers on St Crispin's day.



Thomas Deloney, *The First Part of the Pleasant and Princely History of the Gentle Craft*

The popularity of these shoemaking stories is demonstrated by the number of reprints of Deloney's work produced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — thirteen editions between 1627 and 1700, many of which were adorned with woodcuts showing scenes from the narrative.¹⁷ Captain Walter Scot (c.1614-1694) certainly knew of them. In his history of the Scot family in Roxburgh and Selkirk he wrote:

That Kings sons have been Tradesmen bred,
Crispin and Crispianus the English king,
Was son to Braenus the British King,
Of such a change men they may admire,
From a Crown to become a Cordiner,
If his Sons son did live to be a man,
And if that he did rightly play his Game,
Durst any Poultry Pismee call him down,
By Exclamation to be a Sutors son.¹⁸

Whatever knowledge and celebration of the Crispin legends, French or English, persisted among post-Reformation Scottish cordiners, from the late 1720s onwards there

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁷ Thomas Deloney, *The First Part of the Pleasant and Princely History of the Gentle Craft*, Early English books on line, <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>>[5/5/2015].

¹⁸ Walter Scott, *A true history of the several honourable families of the right honourable name Scot in the shires of Roxburgh and Selkirk and others adjacent, second part* (Edinburgh, 1688), p. 39.

are a number of Edinburgh references to St Crispin. A broadside ballad of 8 May 1725, purporting to be a petition from the apprentice shoemakers of the West-Port for drink money, addressed the cordiners as ‘Ye Sons of Old Crispin, a Saint and a King’, implying the best of both traditions.¹⁹ Less complimentary, a broadside lampoon of a Jacobite officer trapped during the blockade of Edinburgh Castle in 1745 includes the lines:

Fam’d Crispin’s tawny Sons, you swarthy Race,
Who whistle to the Awl in evr’y Place²⁰

While substantial evidence exists for the continued commemoration of Crispin by English and European shoemakers — Wells cordwainers, for example, regularly presented their show of ‘the whole historie of Krispie and Krispiani’ between 1617 and 1642 — the first documented reappearance of a form of Scottish associational celebration is in 1720.²¹ Among the records of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh is a receipt dated 1720, for payment of ‘on guinie for the uz and behove of the journeymen anent Crispians day’.²² This would suggest a festivity of some kind but there is nothing further to say whether this contribution or gift from the masters to the journeymen was for a long-established custom or a new one. In the accounts of the Stirling Incorporation of Shoemakers for 1726 there is an entry of expenditure of eighteen shillings for ‘airing the Crispeanes and the mortcloths’.²³ Morris speculated that the ‘Crispeanes’ were flags, sashes and similar material carried in Crispin processions. The word ‘airing’ certainly suggests an exposure whether public or private and that the cordiners had Crispin regalia. The first recorded Stirling procession, however, is that of 1815 — mounted by ‘the shoemakers’ as part of the New Year celebrations and apparently last seen more than fifty years earlier.²⁴

In 1700 in Edinburgh, on the other hand, the Incorporation had rejected a petition from the journeymen to establish their own box for relief of the poor, a clear indication that the journeymen had some kind of corporate identity.²⁵ When they eventually gained the privilege in 1737, two masters were appointed to attend the journeymen’s meetings.²⁶

¹⁹ NLS, Ry.111 a.10, *Worshipful Cordners*, (Edinburgh, 1725).

²⁰ NLS, S.302.b.2(120), *The Blockade of Edinburgh Castle* (Edinburgh, 1745).

²¹ James Stokes, ‘The Wells Cordwainers Show: New Evidence Concerning Guild Entertainments in Somerset’, *Comparative Drama*, vol. 19, no. 4 (winter 1985–6), pp. 332–346.

²² NRS, GD348/122, *Bonds, Accounts and Discharges of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh, 1716-1720*.

²³ Morris, *The Incorporation of Shoemakers of Stirling*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Caledonian Mercury*, January 9, 1815.

²⁵ NRS, GD348/206, *Minutes of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh*, 2 December 1700.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 May 1737, GD348/207.

The emergence of fraternities composed exclusively of journeymen set up to represent their interests as opposed to those of the masters of the traditional guilds has been attributed to the increasingly uneconomically viable medieval craft ideal of progression from apprentice to journeyman and then eventually to master.²⁷ With little chance of becoming masters, by the early eighteenth century most urban journeymen would spend their lives as wage earning employees, categorized by their specific occupational societies and periodic incidents of striking to improve their conditions.²⁸ Organizing festivities as sons of Crispin would have given the journeymen shoemakers a clear identity and set them apart from other craftsmen who, whatever the legends maintained in their initiation rites, were not publically associated with their medieval saints.²⁹ Thus in what appears to be the earliest newspaper record found of such an event, on 26 October 1739 Edinburgh citizens witnessed a procession of journeymen shoemakers who accompanied a richly dressed Crispin, preceded by wardens and hautboys, through the Canongate and suburbs. The journeymen wore 'a cockade with the Crown and Cutting knife on it'.³⁰ The crown and cutting knife logo seems unique to Scotland, appearing on armorial bearings, minute books, banners, and insignia in many places, causing nineteenth-century antiquaries to comment on what they thought was the special royal emphasis of Scottish cordiners:

....there was a notion that Crispin was a Royal personage, and hence we find the shoemakers in Scotland at least, assuming for their arms a leather knife surmounted by a crown, and styling themselves the Royal craft.³¹



²⁷ David Stevenson, *The First Freemasons: Scotland's Early Lodges and their Members* (Aberdeen, 1989), p. 42.

²⁸ W. Hamish Fraser, *Conflict and Class: Scottish Workers 1700–1838* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 19–56; R. A. Houston, *Social Change in the Age of Enlightenment Edinburgh 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1994), p. 98; Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society 1707–1830: Beyond Jacobitism, towards industrialisation* (Manchester, 2000), p. 210.

²⁹ St Eloi, patron of the hammermen was replaced by St Clement or 'Old Clem' by English blacksmiths in their trade lore. See Angela Tuckett, *The Blacksmiths' History* (Southampton, 1974), Appendix A.

³⁰ *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 October 1739.

³¹ John Timbs, *Something for everybody (and a garland for the year)* (London, 1866), p. 113.

With no mention of any disorder or threat to the peace, several thousands of the populace according to the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, watched the shoemakers' parade in 'honour of their Tutelar St Crispin' on 26 October 1741. This seems to have been an altogether more elaborate affair with regard to King Crispin's costume, the number of his attendants, the colours with an image of St Crispin taking the measure of Ursula's foot — a scene from *The Gentle Craft* often depicted in woodcuts — and the accompanying band of music.

Their King was very richly drest, he had a fine crimson velvet suit, trimmed with Gold, a Train of crimson satin fac'd with Ermin and a collar round his shoulder with the Order of their Champion Crispianus; on his head was a rich coronet adorned with Jewels, a Gold Ribband was tied round his Left Leg, and he had a Baton in his Hand.³²

The newspaper commented ambiguously on its being 'one of the gayest Processions that had been seen here for a long Time'.³³ The scale of this celebration was no doubt due to the agreement that different groups of journeymen had made with each other for commemorating St Crispin's Day.

The earliest indication of such cooperation comes from a transcription of a copy of old papers written at the end of the *Minutes of the Edinburgh Royal St Crispin Lodge* 1881-1890.³⁴ Stated to be minutes, the first entry is for 20 October 1740:

The Society being fully met and convened within their convening house and taking to their consideration the article and contract with the Town Society for commemorating the day of the memorable Crispin as the scroll of the proposals now laid before them and underwritten bears do unanimously agree and authorize the present Stewards.

Expenditure for the commemoration included £3 10s for 'Crispin Robes', £2 4s 6d for 'Beef and Mutton for Crispin dinner', and 4s 6d for 'shoes and stockings for John Colville'. Cash received at 'Crispin dinner' amounted to £3 10s. Some light is shed on this record by a newspaper article of 1827 which reported on a centenary dinner held in Edinburgh in the Cordiners Hall, Potterow, by the members of the 'Old Society of Journeymen Shoemakers of Edinburgh' and those of the 'Old Society of Journeymen Shoemakers of the Borough of Canongate'. Both groups claimed an institution date of 13 February 1727. Moreover:

³² *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 27 October, 1741 quoted in *The Antiquary*, vol.vi (1882), p. 142. The journalist here confused Princess Ursula with St Ursula, an entirely different figure.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Edinburgh City Museums, *Minutes of the Edinburgh Royal St Crispin Lodge 1881-1890*.

The Old Regalia of Crispin, which used in former times to be so proudly displayed through the principal parts of our ancient city are the joint property of both societies (although each society's funds are independently its own) and these old ensigns of royalty, although completely worn out are still preserved as relics of former times. An exchange takes place once every year of these relics, one society keeping the robes and crown, while the other keeps the flags and so on alternatively.³⁵

Assuming this information to be correct, the 1740 record must have been made by the Canongate journeymen and the Town Society referred to, the journeymen cordiners of Edinburgh.

The copied entries marked 'Minutes' are selective from 1740-1758 while those for expenditure and income range from 1740–1775.³⁶ The last entries are concerned with money received from lending the 'Crispin Robes'; ten shillings for sending them to Dundee in 1770, 3s 9d 'for our part of the Robes lent out' in 1772 and ten shillings in 1775. An entry of 1755 accredited 13s 6d as being 'the half of £1 7s lending the robes to the Journeymen of Glasgow'; while Kelso hired the colors in 1757. Further unnamed loans of the Crispin robes earned 10s in 1763, 1765, and 1772. These loans are particularly interesting as a demonstration of the communication that existed among shoemaker communities across Scotland; and are perhaps an indication that the Edinburgh cordiners were being imitated. There is no mention, however, of any contact with Aberdeen where on 25 October 1746 the journeymen shoemakers processed in respect of St. Crispin's Day, complete with the 'King, Knights, Pages, Lords, drums and music and some of Brigadier Fleming's men', all of which was followed by a grand entertainment and another procession.³⁷

A cross-referencing of entries with newspaper accounts of processions from 1740 to 1776 shows five years when the latter are recorded while entries are lacking, namely for 1754, 1760, 1762, 1763, and 1776. This is probably not of consequence as there are no entries for a total of fourteen years within this period. The press reported Edinburgh processions in 1742, 1743, 1745, 1754, 1760, 1763, 1771, 1772, and 1776, but no more until 1820. There is no report, unfortunately, for 1757, the year in which — according to the biographical sketch accompanying a portrait of Orlando Hart — there was a disputed election. Hart, a future Deacon of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh, was chosen to be King Crispin, but an opposing faction crowned its candidate also, and so

³⁵ *Caledonian Mercury*, 2 April, 1827.

³⁶ ECM, *Minutes of the Edinburgh Royal St Crispin Lodge 1881–1890*, appendix. Appended minutes are dated 1740, 1741, 1742, 1745, 1757 and 1758: expenditure is dated 1740, 1741, 1742, 1743, 1744, 1750, 1754, 1757, 1758, 1763, 1765: income relates to 1740, 1742, 1743, 1749, 1750, 1754, 1755, 1757, 1761, 1763, 1765, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1775.

³⁷ *General London Evening Mercury*, 13 November, 1746.

two kings reputedly walked in the same procession.³⁸ In some years descriptions of processions are more fulsome than others — in 1772 *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* merely repeated the account of the previous year.³⁹ Participants are usually described as ‘the journeymen shoemakers of this city’, but sometimes apprentices are added and they parade through the City or City and Liberties, or City and suburbs or neighborhood with the press accounts of 1749 describing King Crispin as ‘the Representative of the ancient and famous Patron of their Trade’.⁴⁰ In 1754 the *Caledonian Mercury* reported that the procession had begun at eleven o’clock from the Abbey (surely an indication of the Canongate shoemakers’ link with their pre-Reformation past); and ‘when they entered the city the music bells were tuned up and played their usual March’.⁴¹ The account concluded with the Edinburgh and Canongate Societies repairing to their respective places of entertainment to celebrate the evening in the usual manner. In 1771, 1772, and 1776 the Palace of Holyroodhouse (rather than the Abbey) is cited as the starting point for the procession; and in 1776 King Crispin and a number of his principal officers went in coaches to the Palace from where they set out to the accompaniment of a regiment band stationed in the Castle.⁴² ‘Claude’, alias James Wilson who kept a school in the Cowgate, penned a poem in honor of St. Crispin’s Day, 25 October 1763.

We still bear in mind
And show to mankind,
Our loyalty by a procession,
To Crispin the great,
Who left kingly state,
And liv’d in a shoemaker’s station.
Tyrannical vice,
In Royal disguise,
Did banish this Prince and his brother,
We received them fair,
And taught them with care,
And thus we became one another.⁴³

There is more in this vain indicating a familiarity with the stories and sentiments of *The Gentle Craft*.

The Edinburgh eighteenth-century Crispin processions and jollifications seem, therefore, to have been organized by the respective journeymen societies of Edinburgh and the Canongate as a demonstration of their continuing link to the traditions of their

³⁸ John Kay, *Original Portraits with biographical details by H. Paton*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 223.

³⁹ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 26 October, 1772.

⁴⁰ *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 October, 1749.

⁴¹ *Caledonian Mercury*, 1754.

⁴² *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 26 October, 1776.

⁴³ Claudero, *Miscellanies in prose and verse, on several occasions* (Edinburgh, 1766), pp. 69–70.

legendary past. Both societies claimed to have been established in 1727; and when 'The Journeymen Shoemakers of the city of Edinburgh' printed a new edition of their 'Articles' in 1778 they specified 13 February as its date of founding.⁴⁴ The regulations included the stipulation that the accounts be supervised by the Keymasters and Committee, together with two members of the Incorporation of Shoemakers of Edinburgh appointed by it. This date of institution is therefore ten years before the first record in the Minutes of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh of the appointment of two masters 'to attend the Journeymen Shoemakers in the Management of the box for the year ensuing'.⁴⁵ The Incorporation, however, was inconsistent in noting the appointment of masters to attend the journeymen (no record for the years 1739 and 1740-2 for example) and the journeymen had to request attendance from the Incorporation in 1758; therefore it looks as though they might indeed have been operating a benefit society from 1727 as they stated.

The Articles of the Journey-men Cordiners and others Benefit Society of Canongate, 2 January 1834, also state that the society had been established on 13 February 1727:

for the purpose of giving a weekly allowance to members when unable to follow their usual employment from accident or disease, and for granting an allowance at the Death of the Members.⁴⁶

The first entry in the Minute Book of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Canongate regarding the journeymen's society is on 3 May 1731 when two members were appointed to attend the journeymen's meeting. When at the end of the century other journeymen shoemaker societies claimed institution dates, these were for the establishment of the benefit functions associated with them: 3 June 1793 for the *Journeymen Shoemakers Society of Wester Portsburgh*; 26 March 1796 for *The Young Journeymen Shoemakers Society of Edinburgh* and also for the *Journeymen Shoemaker Society for City and Suburbs*.⁴⁷

Signs that the joint organization of the celebration of St Crispin's Day did not always run smoothly appeared very early. On 14 October 1742:

⁴⁴ A copy on microfilm (1135) is held by the Goldsmiths' Library University of London and can be accessed through <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet?MOME?> [17/12/2009].

⁴⁵ NRS, GD348/207, *Minutes of the Incorporation of Cordiners of Edinburgh 1730–1764*, 5 May 1737.

⁴⁶ NRS, FS1/17/86, *Articles of the Journey–men Cordiners and others Benefit Society of Canongate*, 2 January 1834.

⁴⁷ NRS, FS1/17/88, *Articles of the Journeymen Shoemakers Society of Wester Portsburgh 1793*, FS1/17/143, *Laws of the Young Journeymen Shoemakers Friendly Society of Edinburgh 1796*, FS3/30, *Articles of the Journeymen Shoemakers Society for the City and Suburbs of Edinburgh*.

some regular members would not attend and the other members of the two Societies of Journeymen Cordoners(sic) on Crispin day notwithstanding of the express obligation formerly contained in the mutual contract of agreement Ordains a fine of 1s in case of absence of Society benefit until paid. This Act to be inviolably observed in time coming and read to the Society yearly, after the election of the person chosen to represent Crispin.⁴⁸

Similarly the *Caledonian Mercury* of 25 October 1748 reported that in celebration of the anniversary of Crispin the journeymen shoemakers of the City and Liberties had divided into two parties; one contributing to the box of the society and the other declining to do so. Both groups, each carrying regalia, progressed into the city by the separate entries of Cowgate and Netherbow. Further, on 20 September 1757, the minutes stated that no proxy should be allowed at the election of King Crispin and recommended the Crispin committee to meet with the Edinburgh Committee. This sounds as if both Societies have separate Crispin committees. Two weeks later a disagreement occurred with the Edinburgh Society over the issue of having a separate house to meet in. This was the year of the disputed election cited earlier when two Crispin Kings apparently walked in procession. Peace must have been restored as 1s was expended in the following year for 'Writing Crispin Agreement' and 6d was paid in 1763 as 'Dues of Crispin committee'. As cited above, money earned from hiring the robes was divided between the two groups. Cash collected at the Crispin election in 1757 and the balance of Crispin money 'received at the decease of Daniel Campbell' in 1758 was 'immediately lodged in the box'; 2s 6d having been paid to the 'town box' in 1742. Clearly Crispin commemoration was an effective method of supplementing the sick and funeral funds deposited in the box, a chest with several locks equivalent to a security safe.

Another insight into the convivial aspect of all this is an entry in 1741:

The Society taking into their consideration that by Act of the Society of the date the 29th Nov 1727 ordaining the 30th day of Nov being St Andrew's Day to be kept and a dinner to be made on that day and each member is thereby ordained to make payment of 1s sterling for defraying the charge of that day and that now the Society taking into their consideration that they doe keep up the 25th Oct being the day of the memorable Crispin doe therefore and herby enact that in all tyme coming the dinner which used to be kept formerly on St Andrew's Day be kept on the 25th October if a lawfull and no fast day and if so the next following being lawful and on which the Crispain day shall be kept.⁴⁹

The replacement of a dinner on St Andrew's Day by one on St Crispin's Day must have given a clear signal that the journeymen shoemakers had returned to the traditions of the past in their celebration of 'the memorable Crispin'.

⁴⁸ ECM, *Minutes of the Edinburgh Royal St Crispin Lodge 1881-1890*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Societies of Journeymen Cordiners of Canongate and Edinburgh appear, therefore, to have undertaken the organization of Crispin celebrations in the eighteenth century, but the references to Crispin committees and the issue of having a separate house to meet in might indicate the formation of a more formal group exclusively for Crispin activity. This would account for the existence of the 'Society of St Crispin' instituted in 1763 or 1764. In 1802 this institution submitted its handwritten new rules for ratification under the Friendly Societies Act of 1793, stating that the 'Society of St Crispen (sic) in Edinburgh' had been established in 1764.⁵⁰ Within the collection of Edinburgh City Museums is a 'Charter Chest of the Society of St Crispin', with an inscription of 23 April 1763. The 1802 friendly society rules give no clues as to the reasons for forming the society beyond the standard mantra of 'rendering that relief that is necessary to members in distress by taking a decent and friendly care of their sick and burying their dead'.⁵¹ Eligible candidates for admission had to be between 18 and 40 years and of sound and healthy constitution, but included men of all lawful employment. It seems unlikely, however, that a group not principally composed of shoemakers or associated with the leather trade would give itself a St Crispin title. Possible explanations for the formation of the society could be dissatisfaction with the benefit provisions of the existing journeymen shoemaker societies; the inability to agree over such matters as elections and meeting places; or the wish to establish a lodge or club devoted to St Crispin commemoration and conviviality with sickness and funeral benefits but independent of operational matters to do with the trade. Or perhaps, as suggested earlier, the St Crispin Society was already operating as a convivial commemorative club to which sickness relief and funeral benefits were added in 1763 and 1764.

Whatever the reason for its formation the St Crispin Society claimed to have 140 members on 26 January 1779 when it joined with a range of institutions around Scotland in opposition to the 'popish bill' brought before Parliament in late 1778 to repeal the penal laws operating against Catholics: no sign here of the later debarring of religious and political discussion from friendly society meetings.⁵² Signatories included the Society of Journeymen Shoemakers in Canongate, the Friendly Society of Journeymen Shoemakers in Edinburgh and suburbs which claimed to have 56 members, as well as the Incorporations of Shoemakers in Portsburgh, Potterow, and Canongate, but not

⁵⁰ NRS, FS3/27, *St Crispen Friendly Society in Edinburgh 1802*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² David Paterson, *Scotland's opposition to the popish bill* (Edinburgh, 1780), p. 49.

Edinburgh. The other organizations of shoemakers protesting against the bill were the 400 members of the Society of Journeymen Shoemakers in Kilmarnock and 500 journeymen shoemakers in Glasgow who claimed to be 'distinguished by the name of St Crispin's Society'.⁵³ This statement about their name by the Glasgow journeymen might indicate a different arrangement from that in Edinburgh, or could be their generic name for journeymen shoemakers. The only other (to date) non-Edinburgh reference to a St Crispin Society prior to 1820 is for Kilmarnock. A notice of 21 November 1786 concerning a scheme for the alteration of the law for grain importation into Scotland was signed by 'Alex. Petrie, St Crispin's Society' and the Incorporated Trades, Universal Friendship, and Journeymen Weavers societies.⁵⁴ According to the nineteenth-century history of Kilmarnock, the mounting of a procession by shoemakers in 1773 necessitated the purchase of robes and other items.⁵⁵ Novelist John Galt also recounted a King Crispin procession got up by the Kilmarnock shoemakers for the gratification of the future Duchess of Portland and her sister when they were girls.⁵⁶ This dates the event to pre-1795 when the Duchess married. The St Crispin Society in Edinburgh was still in existence in 1833 when handwritten revised articles were submitted for ratification by the Advocate Depute. There is no record of the dissolution of the society, but the fact that it submitted handwritten rules at a time when so many other friendly societies produced printed copies is either a sign of extreme frugality or that funds were too low to warrant the expenditure.

In the accounts of the Edinburgh processions organized either by the St Crispin Society or the combined Canongate and Edinburgh Journeymen Societies, only King Crispin merited a description. Other participants were named as Wardens, Hautboys, Pages, Ushers, Officers, or Guards; and in 1739 'each Man wore a Cockade, with the Crown and Cutting knife on it'.⁵⁷ This representation of the patron by a costumed figure appears somewhat akin to the Low Countries where certain craft based religious organizations reemerged in the seventeenth century. Antwerp had a brotherhood for journeymen shoemakers in 1686 and for silk weavers in 1698; more followed in the

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 84, 257.

⁵⁴ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 30 November, 1786.

⁵⁵ Archibald McKay, *The History of Kilmarnock* (Kilmarnock, 1858), p. 105.

⁵⁶ John Galt, *Autobiography*, vol.1 (London, 1833), p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Caledonian Mercury*, October 26, 1739.

eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Each had its own patron saint and organized banquets, dances and other festivities. It was not until 1792 that the Antwerp journeymen brotherhood of shoemakers became an association for mutual aid.⁵⁹ In 1777 the Bishop of Antwerp complained about the excessive drinking and lascivious activities that accompanied feasts of patron saints, but dressing up as the saint and parading through the streets continued in Malines into the nineteenth century. The first recorded appearance of Crispin as King in Edinburgh in 1739 could be interpreted as a statement by the journeymen of their separate identity and independence, a symbolic declaration that while they might not be masters they could elect a king from one of their number. There may also be political inferences to be drawn: the journeymen wielded no authority within the incorporation, they had no vote in the selection of deacon, and they had no electoral power to influence governments but they could select their own monarch. French precedents existed for kings being elected by craftsmen other than shoemakers, such as the Parisian journeymen tailors who chose a king of their company in 1505; or the Bazoche, the guild of clerks working for ministerial officials in Paris and other French towns who annually elected a king and officers on 1 May and processed with them.⁶⁰ The members of Edinburgh's Cape Club who convened together from 1764 until 1843 also elected a sovereign whom they crowned, perhaps in parody of the Crispins.⁶¹

The Crispin processions could also be seen in the context of clandestine Jacobitism, a reference to an alternative king, although the cancellation of the Crispin dinner in 1745 when the Jacobite forces were present in Edinburgh might indicate otherwise.⁶² Recent research has discerned a distinct lack of a dedicated organization designed specifically to support Scottish Jacobitism at home and abroad, particularly between 1717 and 1739 with purported Jacobite clubs serving mainly as safety valves rather than action groups.⁶³ Conversely, eighteenth-century processions could be seen as loyalist demonstrations, commemorations of a Protestant king rather than a Catholic

⁵⁸ Alfons K. L. Thijs, 'Religion and social structure: religious rituals in pre-industrial trade associations in the Low Countries' in Maarten Roy Prak, ed., *Craft guilds in early modern Low Countries: work, power and representation* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 157, 165.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁶⁰ James R. Farr, *Artisans in Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 207; Roland E. Mousnier, *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy 1598–1789*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1984), p. 322; Marius Audin, *La Bazoche et les clerks du palais* (Lyon, 1909), p. 7.

⁶¹ NLS, MS2004, *Sederunt Book of the Knights Companions of the Cape No 1st Commencing in 1764 and Ending 24 July 1787*.

⁶² ECM, *Minutes of the Edinburgh Royal St Crispin Lodge 1881-1890*.

⁶³ Allan I. MacInnes, 'Jacobitism in Scotland', *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. LXXXVI, 2, no. 222 (October, 2007), p. 248.

saint. The celebration of royal anniversaries in early Hanoverian Britain was widespread, the king's birthday being the particular focus for demonstrating the loyalty of the largely Presbyterian Scotland.⁶⁴

In Kilmarnock, however, as well as King Crispin, a Lord Mayor and Alderman, an Indian King and a Champion encased in a coat of mail appeared in the pageant although this might be the author's assumption gained from reading accounts of much later processions in Kilmarnock.⁶⁵ Crispin, the Lord Mayor, Indian King and Champion are all depicted in the frieze of a Dundee St Crispin procession begun in 1787, completed in 1825 and now on display in McManus Art Gallery and Museum.⁶⁶ In Glasgow the unfortunate champion of King Crispin in the 1790 procession hired the 'armour' of William Wallace from Dumbarton Castle and as a consequence of the wearing it through the streets of the city, died of a chill; while John Galt, in guise of the disapproving small town provost complained of periodic resuscitations of King Crispin 'in all his glory and regality, with the man in the coat-of-mail, of bell-metal, and the dukes, and lord mayor of London'.⁶⁷ In 1777 the St Crispin's Day horseback procession of shoemakers in Bury St Edmunds also included a character in 'coat of Mail', namely Crispin's brother Crispianus attended by his troops.⁶⁸ Newspaper accounts of the processions in Edinburgh made no mention of a Champion which raises the question as to whether this was an omission or that no Champion was present. Journalists who reported the Crispin processions in future years made much of the appearance of the Champion; and a satire on Archibald Cockburn, Sheriff of Mid Lothian in 1784, described him on horseback bearing down on a mob at Canonmills, Edinburgh, 'brandishing like the champion of King Crispin on the 25th of October, his sword, instead of a whip'.⁶⁹

The most likely explanation for the figure of the Champion is as chivalric defender of King Crispin, yet there was a centuries' old tradition of champions or figures in armor appearing in varieties of parades where a king did not feature. The best known pre-Reformation champion figure was that of St George who, clad in armor, processed

⁶⁴ Bob Harris and Christopher A. Whatley, "'To Solemnize His Majesty's Birthday': New Perspectives on Loyalism in George II's Britain", *History*, vol.8, no. 271 (July, 1998), pp. 397–419.

⁶⁵ McKay, *History of Kilmarnock*, p. 105.

⁶⁶ Crispin measuring Princess Ursula's foot is depicted on a banner carried in the procession.

⁶⁷ John D. Carrick, *Life of Sir William Wallace of Elderslie* (Edinburgh, 1830), p. 144; John Galt, *The Provost* (Edinburgh, 1822), p. 137.

⁶⁸ *MS Common Place Book*, quoted in Samuel Tymms, *East Anglian, or Notes and queries* (Lowestoft, 1864), p. 31; John Glyde, *The New Suffolk garland* (Ipswich, 1866), p. 280.

⁶⁹ Jeremiah Jobson, *Historical Narrative of the Exploits of the Sheriff of Mid Lothian* (London, 1784), pp. 6–7.

annually through Norwich, led by a sword bearer, standard bearer, musicians and dragon, with a princess added in 1530.⁷⁰ Mills cites a post-Reformation procession of St George in Lanark.⁷¹ A man or men in armour featured regularly in the Lord Mayor of London's show which had become something of an annual civic event by 1585. The 1591 show included a Champion, with two in 1611 and eight men in armour 'cap a pee' on horseback in 1700.⁷² Some seventeenth-century editions of *The Gentle Craft*, however, depict the figures of the brothers with Crispin in contemporary dress and Crispianus in armour as in the Bury pageant.

The inclusion by the shoemakers of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen in Crispin processions not only imitated the custom of London royal coronations since the fifteenth century but also alluded, intentionally or otherwise, to their own legends. The third story in Thomas Deloney's *The History of the Gentle Craft* charted the rise of Simon Eyre, transformed into a master shoemaker rather than draper, to status of Lord Mayor of London. As a pageant participant, an Eastern personage was nothing new. The English mummer plays often had St George fighting against 'The Turkish Knight' with conventionally black face; and King of the Moors robed in red satin mantle and armed with a 'long sword' appeared in the London Midsummer show of 1521.⁷³ Often an Eastern figure in pageants represented trading links such as those of the Grocers' Company with the East depicted in Thomas Middleton's civic employments of the early seventeenth century.⁷⁴ An argument can be made, however, for a more specific trade myth explanation for the figure in the Crispin processions. In Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, while Crispin is wooing the princess Ursula, his brother Crispianus is dispatched to Gaul to fight for the Emperor against the mighty force of the Persian General Iphicrates who just happens to be the son of a shoemaker. After much fighting in which Crispianus acquits himself nobly, Iphicrates has to concede that he 'a Shoemakers son was by a shoemaker foyled'.⁷⁵ Reconciliation and rejoicing follow, then the Persian general departs with his army, never to annoy them again. Crispianus, knighted for his heroic efforts, returns to Britain to be reunited with his brother and achieve a happy ending.

⁷⁰ Muriel C. McClendon, 'A Moveable Feast: Saint George's Day', *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no.1 (1999), p. 12.

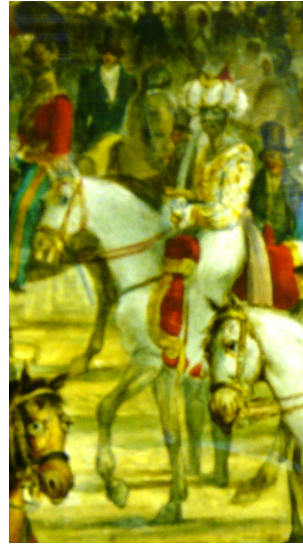
⁷¹ Anna Jean Mills, *Medieval Plays in Scotland* (London, 1927), p. 70.

⁷² Robert Withington, *English Pageantry; An Historical Outline*, vol.1 (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 47, 60; 2:26, 33, 68.

⁷³ Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 40.

⁷⁴ R. C. Bald, 'Middleton's Civic Employments', *Modern Philology*, vol. 31, no. 1 (August 1933), p. 74.

⁷⁵ Deloney, *The Gentle Craft* (1637), p. 36, (1675), p. 23.



The Champion, Herald and Indian Prince of the Royal St Crispin Society as depicted in William Turner, *Entry of George IV into Edinburgh 1822*.

Sir Hugh, the first character featured in Deloney's tales, is missing from these eighteenth-century processions. He did not appear until the 1820 Edinburgh procession. Neither the St Crispin Society nor the journeymen shoemaker societies organised this event which was the production of the Royal St Crispin Society founded in 1817. The reasons remain speculative for the creation of this Society in Edinburgh by a group of working men, most of whom were shoemakers, when a St Crispin Society and several journeymen shoemaker societies already existed. Although there were no Crispin processions in Edinburgh after 1776, periodic public commemoration of St Crispin or his day had continued elsewhere, notwithstanding the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France — from 1787 to 1819 at least seven towns witnessed St Crispin processions (some more than one). The founder members of the Royal St Crispin Society, however, possibly were never members of the St Crispin Society; or more likely, as with other fraternal groups, broke away to form an organization with a more ritualistic ethos, incorporating the old St Crispin customs but remodeling them in a fashionable format influenced by the ceremonies of their contemporary freemason fellow citizens. Some may even have been practicing or former freemasons though there would have been a serious cost implication for low wage-earners of belonging to more than one organization; and the secrets of freemasonry were also hardly secret.

The Royal St Crispin Society, a uniquely Scottish creation and its subsequent nineteenth-century re-incarnations lasted until around 1908 and shoemaker groups in Leith, Dalkeith, Montrose, Perth, Dundee, Kirkcaldy, Linlithgow, Falkirk, Stirling, Alloa,

Glasgow, Greenock, Airdrie, and elsewhere held charters from it as branch lodges. The Society had three Orders — St Crispin, the Knights of Sir Hugh and the Court of Masters — each with its own initiation ceremony, ritual, and regalia incorporating shoemaker legends and terminology but heavily influenced by freemasonic practice and perhaps that of the Free Gardener Societies which had operated in the Lothians and Fife since the later seventeenth century. In the early years members comprised mostly, but not exclusively, shoemakers or those associated with the leather trade but by the end of the nineteenth century these were in the minority. Most of the processions or appearances in other processions after 1820 were organized by the Royal St Crispin lodges whose later members — unlike the eighteenth-century sons of Crispin — continued to commemorate a patron of whom they knew little, if anything, and who were unaware of the legends and traditions of the gentle craft.



Model of Crispin in EL Museu del Calçat (Shoe Museum) Barcelona

**For the history of the St Crispin Lodges of Edinburgh and Scotland see:
Sandra M. Marwick, *Sons of Crispin: the St Crispin Lodges of Edinburgh and Scotland* (Newcastle-on-Tyne, 2014).**