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Freemason Scots 'laid foundations of America'

By Kath Gourlay

JULY 4 is a date firmly fixed in the consciousness of all Americans. Perhaps it should also be imprinted in the mind of Scots with a sense of history. Who was involved in the building of the White House? And who helped to start the American War of Independence?

The surprising answer might be Scottish freemasons. No question about it, Bob Cooper, the Grand Lodge of Scotland curator, said. It's all documented, and lots more besides. Mr. Cooper recently visited the US to re-establish the role of Scottish freemasons in the founding of America.

Freemasonry worldwide had to rediscover its Scottish roots, he said, or its original message of spiritual selfimprovement would be lost. Scotland is different from the rest of the world because we go back long before freemasonry came into being as an 18th-century organisation. We were ordinary working guys, skilled craftsmen, with ancient knowledge and rituals. When freemasonry came in there was a fusion. That didn't happen anywhere else.

Scottish freemasonry, he said, was a grassroots movement. It was the original egalitarian society, and that's what we took to America, he said. They took the spark of revolution too, Mr. Cooper believes. Members of the Lodge of St Andrew, granted a charter in Scotland in 1756, met in the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston. One of the brothers was the revolutionary Paul Revere and on St Andrew's night, November 30, 1773, it was recorded that the lodge meeting was adjourned as consignees of tea took up the Brethren's time.

For American settlers, taxation without representation on British goods like tea was unacceptable. Similar activities disrupted other meetings and on the night of the Boston Tea Party, when revolutionaries dressed as Mohawks tipped huge quantities of British tea into Boston harbour, the Lodge was closed. The British dubbed the Green Dragon Tavern the cradle of the revolution and war broke out soon after.

The origins of the White House, Mr. Cooper said, made interesting reading, too. The new nation needed stonemasons to build Washington DC, and a prestigious building for its president. In a place where things had been timber-built, skilled stonemasons were scarce. So the mother lodges in Scotland were contacted and stonemasons, who were also freemasons, were headhunted for the job. We know this because their absences and

where they went had been logged to explain their nonpayment of lodge dues. There were scores of them from lodges all over Scotland.

One of America's best-known paintings shows George Washington in Masonic apron laying the cornerstone of the Capitol building. According to Mr Cooper, the President personally recruited top stonemasons from the Journeyman Lodge in Edinburgh. Their skills, so the story goes, were put to the test 15 years later when British forces attempted to burn Washington. The President's house was so well constructed that only the wooden roof was damaged, Mr. Cooper said. Once they'd repaired the roof they disguised the soot damage by whitewashing it. Since then, it's been known as the White House. He added: So who built America? We did.