

THE MAISON DIEU OF ELGYN.

As the name suggests the origin of the *Maison Dieu* 'movement' lies in France - to be exact, in Paris. At some point in the middle of the 7th-century, what was ultimately to be called the HÔTEL DIEU, was founded on the *Parvis du Notre Dame*, between the cathedral and Sainte-Chapelle. It had grown out of an early monastery that was transformed, in the 9th-century, into a hospice for the poor. It soon became a dependency of the cathedral chapter and was then known as the *Hôpital Notre Dame*. At the start of the 12th-century it became known as the *Maison-Dieu de Paris* and the name *Hôtel Dieu* came into use as a late medieval term. In Latin charters it became known as the *Domus Dei*. From the middle of the 12th-century it seems to have begun to accept the sick of Paris rather than the poor but neither to the exclusion of the other. It was continually endowed with donations and attracted many noble patrons, including the King.

During the 13th-century a number of the French kings expanded the hospital on the land lying along the River Seine, between the cathedral and the *Petit Pont*: the 'house' consisted of three large Gothic spaces divided by rows of pillars. Vaults (the famous "*cagnards*") protected the building against floods. The oldest known rule for the hospital dates from this time (1217) and is attributed to a canon of the cathedral called Stephen. It directed that *in-dwellers* of the house or hospital were required to make their confession, and receive Communion, before being admitted; after this they were brought to a bed and from that point on the lay brothers and sisters serving the house were directed to treat the individual as if they were the 'master' of the house.

In many ways, these Maisons Dieu followed the noble example set by the various hospitaller orders of knights, in that they provided hospitality (and a measure of protection) to travellers. But, the military orders were principally involved with travellers engaged in *pilgrimage* and the knights were mostly enlisted from the noble classes and gentry. A Maison Dieu preceptory was involved primarily with the poor of that locality and travellers of any kind who were in need of support. The staff at the preceptory was composed of 'local' people of any class who wished to dedicate their lives in this way to the service of the poor and indigent travellers.

But there is a confusion – when was a hospital a Maison Dieu? We must first rid ourselves of the modern concept of a *hospital* being only for the sick. In the medieval era it is better to think of a '*hospitium*' – literally a place which provides *hospitality, friendship, or lodging*. It was often the case that a *hospitium*, like that of St Nicholas on Spey, did indeed provide for the poor, housing and caring for them in the long-term, but its primary focus was on the care of travellers which was usually on a more short-term basis. It could be argued that a *Domus Dei* was more focussed on the long-term care of the poor (which would have included some sick in-dwellers). Also, in general, a Maison Dieu was run by the local townspeople whereas a *hospitium* could be found in the countryside, and was frequently managed directly by the Church. Writing in 1873, the then Chaplain to the Forces, Rev. H.P. Wright, commented:

“These Hospitals in England were generally founded at seaport towns or near the sea, so that they might receive pilgrims and strangers, both men and women, on their way to any renowned shrine; and they were usually within the walls of the town. In its original constitution the God's House [*Domus Dei*] was not purely ecclesiastical, the Master

being sometimes a layman , sometimes a priest ; but, as a rule, when the revenue permitted, the office of Master was filled by a priest.”¹

He continued:

“We find these Hospitals at Southampton, Portsmouth, Dover, Arundel, &c., because they were there conveniently placed for pilgrims making for the great shrines of Winchester, Canterbury, Chichester, &c. They are generally of the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries and had a common plan; a long hall with vaulting and divided into bays by pillars. At one end was usually a porch, and at the other invariably a chapel. The central part of the hall was kept free, the occupants being housed in the aisles. Beside being Hospitals for the sick and aged like St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester, which preserves its ancient arrangement with dwellings or cells in the aisles, they were true Houses of God; the poor, the houseless, and the wanderer found a home there; not with advantage I fear to the community at large, since the gathering together of distressed strangers must have tended greatly to spread the various contagious diseases, which proved such terrible scourges during the middle ages. The government was vested in a Master; Brethren aided by Sisters carried on the duties of nursing, prescribing, cooking, &c., while the spiritual care of the Hospital was entrusted to Priest Chaplains.”²

The idea became popular and the general population, of all ranks and classes, found it to be a very suitable subject for donations since its activities were focussed on supporting ‘local’ people rather than some more distant ecclesiastical body.

Soon, a Maison Dieu was to be found in a significant number of major travel ‘hubs’ and we find a *Domus Dei* in Roxburgh before 1128³; Dover (St Mary’s) established by 1203⁴; Ospringe, Faversham established in 1234⁵; Brechin in c.1256⁶; Berwick by 1300⁷; Dunbar (undated); as well as Elgin which was founded c.1239.

Elgin Maison Dieu.

Charter evidence shows that at some date between the years 1225 and 1237⁸, Andrew, Bishop of Moray, founded a *Domus Dei* at Elgin, situated between the *Burn of Taok*, and the *Lepper-house*. He established a number of *brothers* and *sisters* within it and endowed the house to allow it to carry out charitable and pious activities within the burgh. Later, King Alexander II. also endowed the house giving it certain properties so that it could continue its work with the poor.⁹

¹ Wright (1867), p. 1.

² *ibid.*, p. 2.

³ Documentary evidence shows that, in 1128, David I made a grant of land to a hospital at Roxburgh, though whether this was the Maisondieu or another hospital is unclear as the hospital supposedly lay some distance from the burgh to prevent infection. The 'Massondew' was among the buildings of Roxburgh that were burnt by English forces in 1545, but the hospice appears in records until the end of the seventeenth century.

⁴ Founded by Hubert de Burgh, Constable of Dover Castle, in 1203.

⁵ Established by King Henry III in 1234.

⁶ Founded in 1256-1264 by Sir William, lord of Brechin and Navar.

⁷ Mentioned in charter of 28 November 1300 [CDS, ii, no. 1178]

⁸ Some believe that the foundation took place in 1229.

⁹ R.E.M., no. 114, pp. 126-127 *Manbeen* and *Kellas* were given by this king to the house on 20th April 1343.

The Maison Dieu, along with many other properties in the burgh, was burned in 1390¹⁰ by the infamous *Wolf of Badenoch*. It is described as “the ‘*domus dei*’ near the walls of Elgin,” on 13 Oct 1394,¹¹ which is a little misleading since Elgin was never a completely walled-town.¹² The office of *hospitaller* of the *Domus Dei*, called St. Mary, appears on record 1 December 1436,¹³ and it is described as “the hospital of Elgyn, commonly called Maysendieu,” on 23 September 1440.¹⁴ In 1445, it was described as “long void and wont to be assigned to secular clerks as a perpetual benefice, though originally founded for the maintenance of poor brothers and sisters.”¹⁵

On 17 November 1520, James [Hepburn], bishop of Moray, granted the *Domus Dei* to the House of Blackfriars in Elgin¹⁶ and this union was confirmed by the Pope on 21 June 1521.¹⁷ But although its revenues appear as pertaining to the Blackfriars (1561-72), there is about this time a record of payment to three *bedesmen*,¹⁸ and in 1567, a gift of the preceptory to Robert Douglas.¹⁹

On 9th January 1576, at Holyrood, the King gifts (*concessit*) to Archibald Douglas of Pittendreich, the lands of Massindeu, Bogsyde, Cardellis (Kirdells), the vallem called the Haugh of Manbeen, Nether and Over Manbeen, Pottinsear (Pittensair), with annual rents in the town of Elgin and Barony of Abirchirdoure (Aberchirder) wherever they are in his kingdom; and those (lands and rents) which belonged to the Friars Preachers of Elgin, and by general order came to the King. The King wished that a single sasine taken at Bogside would stand for all. Paying one penny *albe firme*.²⁰

Finally, King James VI., because the lands and rents of the hospital since the Reformation have been applied to the particular use of certain persons without respect to the poor for whom it was founded, grants the hospital to the provost and council for the provision of a preceptor who will teach music and other liberal arts and for placing in it as many poor as are provided for by the first foundation. (22 March 1594/5)²¹

At the Second Reformation, the Crown seized the house and, on 22nd March 1594, King James, gave the magistrates of Elgyn the lands and superiorities which had belonged to this hospital, or *Domus Dei*, vulg. *Meffindew*, “for supporting some poor, agreeable to the design of the original foundation”

¹⁰ In May and June of 1390, forces under the command of Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan – better known as *the Wolf of Badenoch* – stormed through Moray to launch devastatingly vicious attacks on the burghs of Forres and Elgin. It is believed that the *Maison Dieu* was one of the ‘victims’ of these attacks.

¹¹ Reg. Aven., 278, fos. 286-7.

¹² Simpson & Stevenson (1982), p. 19. Only the Chanonry of the Cathedral was completely enclosed.

¹³ Reg. Supp., 329, fo. 202.

¹⁴ Reg. Supp., 367, fo. 290v.

¹⁵ CPL, ix., 480. Dated: 7 Id. Oct. 1445 at St Peter’s, Rome. “To the dean of Moray. Mandate to collate and assign to Alexander Lychton, priest, of the diocese of Aberdeen, M.A. and I.U.B., the hospital called God’s house near Elgin, in the diocese of Moray, which has long been wont to be assigned to secular clerks as a perpetual benefice, (fn. 6) and which was originally founded for the maintenance of poor brothers and sisters, on whose voidance by the resignation of James Innes its rector to John, bishop of Moray, that bishop committed it, temporarily and under certain conditions, to John Boyl, priest, of the said diocese, who has by his proctor William Lyel, perpetual vicar of Inchin in the diocese of Aberdeen, ceded the said commission to the pope, so that the said hospital, which is without cure and consists of temporal estates, (fn. 7) and whose yearly value does not exceed £10. of old sterling, is still void as above. *Dignum etc.* (An. and G. Gonne. | An. xxvi. Sexto Id. Januarii Anno Quintodecimo. de Adria.) [3 pp.]

¹⁶ NLS, MS 34.7.2

¹⁷ Reg. Supp., 1744, fos. 192-192v.

¹⁸ Thirds, 32, 109, 133.

¹⁹ R.S.S., v., no. 2416.

²⁰ R.M.S., iv., no. 2485, p. 668.

²¹ R.M.S., vi., no. 249, p. 84.

and the magistrates were appointed patrons.²² This gift was confirmed by a royal charter, dated 5th December 1599.

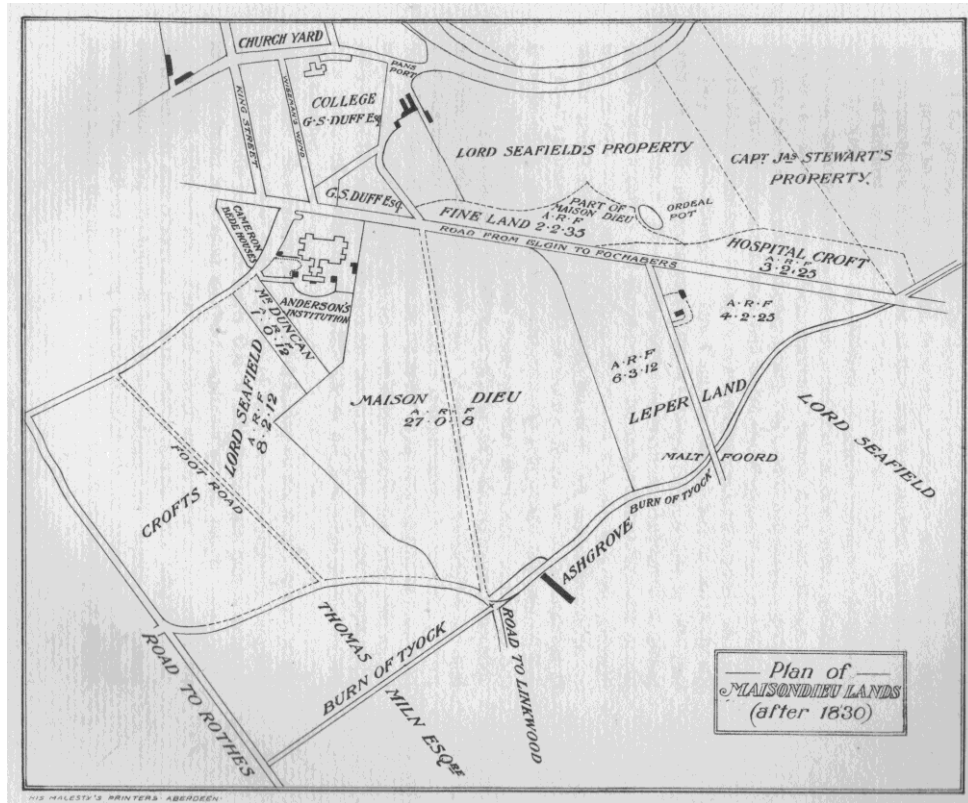


Figure 1: Sketch Map showing the lands of the Maison Dieu and the Lepper House, and the Burn of Taok (Tyock).

²² R.M.S., vi., no. 249, p. 83-84; Cowan & Easson (1976), p. 179.



Figure 2: Robert Ray's Map of Elgin (1838) showing the Maison Dieu and its lands and the lands that belonged to the Lepper Hospital (which were by then all Town Property). © Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

On the last day of February, 1620, the magistrates obtained another charter, under the Great Seal, confirming King James' original grant, and appointing them not only to maintain a few poor out of these lands and superiorities, but also to support a schoolmaster, "*ad docendum musicam, aliasque artes liberales, infra dictum nostrum burgum in posterum.*"²³ The original charters are kept in the Town's archives. The magistrates built and kept in repair, a house for lodging four *beidmen*, giving each of them four bolls of *bear* yearly, with a gown, and a small piece of garden ground. The rest of the fund was applied to the maintenance of schools.²⁴

"In consequence of some Royal grants, the magistrates have been enabled to build two school-houses, which are kept in proper repair. To one master, who teaches church-music, writing, reading, and arithmetic, they give L.10 yearly. They have also established a schoolmaster for classical learning, the teacher of which has L.21 Sterling of salary, arising partly from this endowment, and partly from mortified money; to which the 'heritors' of the town or country, contribute nothing; so that it is not a legal parochial school, though it answers that purpose.

The magistrates, and several respectable inhabitants, wishing to have the plan of education in the town enlarged, and that the children might be instructed in some additional branches of learning, immediately under their own eye, have proposed a plan, for an academy in the town, in which, not only reading English, arithmetic, and classical learning, is to be taught, but Greek, French, geography, book-keeping, and various branches of the mathematics, with land-surveying, and [technical] drawing. The magistrates have subscribed, for carrying this plan into effect, L.42 Sterling a year, and the inhabitants have contributed already about L.500 Sterling; and, depending on the liberality of the public, have addressed their friends at home and abroad to assist them. —There are also Sunday schools established in the town, and with success."²⁵

²³ RMS, vii., no. 2141, p. 778; RMS, vi, no 249, p. 83-84. "... and a qualified master of music for the instruction of the youth of the said burgh and the performance of the ordinary services in the said church; as well as the said poor and the bedesmen offering daily prayers for the safety of the king and the kings successors for posterity"

²⁴ [OSA, Vol. V., 1793, p. 14.](#)

²⁵ [OSA, Vol. V., 1793, p. 14.](#)

The chapel, which was a fundamental part of the life of the Maison Dieu, evidently survived to some degree well into the 18th century. Known as *Maison Dieu Chapel*, it stood within a small park in Elgin until it was apparently destroyed in a large storm in 1773. The remains of the *graveyard* could also only just be made out at this time. The site is now fully covered by a 1960s housing development and a number of bones and skulls were uncovered during the building works.²⁶ Local street names still commemorate the Maisondieu.

CHARTER EVIDENCE

Source 1: REM., no. 116, p. 128.

3 November 1391

Attestation of the foundation of the Domus Dei.

To all who inspect this present letter, greetings. William de Spyny, precentor, Henry de Pluscardine, chancellor, and William Gerland, sub-dean of the church of Moray, on account of the evil government of Moray, in the remote areas, applied for the safety and unquestionable faith of the undersigned. We bear faithful testimony to everyone, and knowingly risk our souls, and for the perpetual memory of the matter were not corrupted by prayer, or by price, by love, or by promise, or by any hope, but because the truth was so, and still is. We put down that we saw and looked carefully at a certain open letter [letter patent] of Lord Andrew, bishop of Moray, of good memory once upon a time, sealed with his seal in green wax, sound and whole, and free from all fault and suspicion, as it had appeared at first sight [when first written], in which it was expressly stated that the Lord Bishop himself had founded the House of God near Elgin, and had endowed the same with certain rents, which we do not remember, and that in all times to our bishops of Moray alone existed the right to provide to the said House of God whenever it was vacant, different masters without interference from anyone, and the masters themselves, thus provided and promoted by the bishops, possessed it with all its lands and rents without any contradiction to our lord the King or to anyone else.

In witness of the foregoing, our seals are hereunto affixed. Given at Aberdeen on the third day of November, in the year 1391.

²⁶ POWIS, 8525

Atteftatio de fundatione Domus Dei •

Univerfis prefentes literas infpecturis Willelmus de Spyny precentor •
 Henriciis de Plufcardy cancellarius et Willelmus Gerland fubdecanus ecclefie
 Moravienfis • propter malum regimen Moravie in remotis agentes • falutem
 et fubfcriptis fidem indubiam adhibere • Univerfitati veftre fidele
 teftimonium perhibemus • ac in animarum noftrarum periculum fcienter
 fufcepimus • et ad perpetuam rei memoriam • non corrupti prece vel pretio
 amore vel odio promiffione aut fpe aliqua • fed quia veritas ita fe habuit et
 habet • deponimus et afferimus nos vidiffe et infpexiffe diligenter quendam
 literam patentem bone memorie quondam domini Andree epifcopi
 Moravienfis figillo fuo in cera viridi impendenti ligillatam • fanam et
 integram ac omni vitio et fufpicionem carentem ut prinia facie apparebat • in
 qua cavebatur exprefse ipfum dominum Epifcopum fundaffe Domum Dei
 juxta Elgin • et aliquibus certis redditibus quos memoriter non tenemus
 dotaffe eandem • et quod totis temporibus noftris epifcopi Moravienfes foli
 et in folidum contulerunt dictam Domum Dei quotiens vacavit diverfis
 magiftris abfque impedimento cujufcunque • et ipfi magiftri per Epifcopos
 fic provifi et promoti poffederunt ipfam cum terris et redditibus fuis
 univerfis fme contradictione quacunque domini noftri Regis vel alterius
 cujufcunque • In premifforum teftimonium figina noftra prefentibus funt
 appenfa • Datum apud Aberden tertio die menfis Novembris anno Domini
 •M^o cccc^o nonagefimo primo •

Source 2: REM., no. 117, p. 129.

c.1391

Testimonies of others regarding the above [previous charter – Source 1].

Testimony of Mr. John Wygus at the Bridge of Spey. in the presence of certain lords namely Sir John Gray and Sir John Wythewyc and other trustworthy persons namely Thomas Hunter, John the son of Augustine, William de Forres, and various others.

Say and stand in the presence of him, that he saw a certain charter of Lord Andrew, formerly Bishop of Moray, of good memory, with two seals of green wax suspended from it, that is, of the Lord Bishop and the cathedral chapter, regarding the foundation of the *Domus Dei* of Elgin which he founded on the land between the royal road [King's High Way] and the *Burn of Taok*, in which the Domus is situated; with the land called *Spetelflat* [Spitalflat] near the houses of the lepers of Elgin; and the land of Pettynsair [Pittensair] within the lordship of Lambrid [Lhanbryde]; and on these lands the said Domus Dei of Elgin was founded by the said Bishop. And he also says and was satisfied under the

same oath that when the suit was lodged in the house of Lord John Pilmore, bishop of Moray, last deceased, the aforesaid bishop gave custody to the said master of the house, first to Roger de Wedale, and secondly the said bishop gave the cure and administration of the said House to brother John Pylmor [Pilmore] a monk of Coupar Abbey and his uncle, and thirdly the said Bishop gave the care of the said House to master Simon de Carayl [Carale], and fourthly the said Bishop gave the ministry of the said House to John de Kinaird, his kinsman. And he also says that the reverend father in Christ, lord Alexander, bishop of Moray, gave the custody of the said House of God to lord Ade de Dundurkus, who still remains with the same.

In witness whereof, as I had not my own seal, I caused the seal of the discrete gentleman, the Succentor of Moray, to be affixed in the presence of those present.

Atteftationes de jure patronatus •

Atteftationes domini Johannis Wylgus facte apud pontem de Spe • magno juramento interveniente • in prefentia dominorum videlicet domini Johannis Gray • et domini Johannis Wythewyc • et aliorum fidedignorum fcilicet Thome Hunteyr • Johannis filii Auguftini • et Willelmi de Fores et aliorum diverforum • Dicit et fatebatur in prefentia eorundem quod vidit quandam cartam bone memorie domini Andree quondam epifcopi Moravienfis • cum duobus figillis pendentibus in cera viridi fcilicet domini Epifcopi et capituli • fuper fundatione Domus Dei de Elgin • quam fundavit in terra a via regia ufque ad rivulum de Taok in qua domus fituata eft • cum terra que vocatur Spetelflat juxta domos leproforum de Elgin • et terra de Pettynfayr infra dominium de Lambride • et fuper hiis terris dicta Domus Dei de Elgin per dictum Epifcopum erat fundata • Ac etiam dicit et fatebatur fub eodem juramento quod quando fuit commorans in domo domini Johannis de Pylmor epifcopi Moravienfis ultimo defuncti predictus Epifcopus dedit cuftodiam dicte Domus magiftro Rogero de Wedale primo • et fecundo dictus Epifcopus dedit curam et adminiftrationem dicte Domus domino Johanni Pylmor monacho de Cwpyr avunculo fuo • et tertio dictus Epifcopus dedit curam dicte Domus magiftro Symony de Carayl • et quarto predictus Epifcopus dedit miniftrationem dicte Domus magiftro Johanni de Kynarde confanguineo fuo • Ac etiam dicit quod reverendus pater in Chrifto dominus Alexander epifcopus Moravienfis dedit cuftodiam dicte Domus Dei domino Ade de Dundurkus qui adhuc remanet cum eadem • In cujus rei teftimonium quia figillum proprium non habui prefens figillum difcreti viri domini Succentoris Moravienfis prefentibus procuravi apponi •

This charter is of considerable importance since it provides:

- ✠ Confirmation of the identity of the founder – Bishop Andrew de Moravia (d.1242) – Bishop of Moray 1222-1242.
- ✠ An accurate location for the site of the Domus Dei within Elgin.
- ✠ The names of the first four masters of the House – master Roger de Wedale; brother John Pilmore, a monk of Coupar Angus Abbey, and uncle of Bishop John Pilmore (d.1362) – Bishop of Moray (1326-1362); master Simon Carayl [Crail?]; master John de Kynarde [Kinnaird].
- ✠ It tell us that Adam de Dundrkus [Dundurcas] had been appointed by Alexander, Bishop of Moray and was still in possession at the time the charter was written..
- ✠ Confirmation that when Andrew de Moravia founded the House be endowed it with:
 - the lands called *Spitalflats* beside the Leper House.
 - the lands of Pettynfayr (Pittensair {NGR: NJ 282607}) near Lhanbryde.
- ✠ It also tells us that the parties concerned were at the *Bridge of Spey*²⁷ when the charter was agreed.

Source 3: REM., no. 118, p. 129-130

1393

Resignation of patronage in favour of Alexander de Dunbar of Frendracht.

In the name of the Lord, Amen. Let all know that in the year of the Lord 1393, on the twenty first day of the month of September, the fifteenth year of the pontificate of Pope Clement VII, Alexander, by the grace of God, bishop of Moray, reverently sitting in tribunal in the house of Christ the Father, in the presence of my undersigned public notary and the undersigned witnesses specially requested for this purpose, appointed personally the powerful lord Thomas de Dunbar, earl of Moray, procurator of the noble man Alexander Dunbar, his brother-in-law, as he said at the special command of Alexander himself, wanting to acknowledge his good faith, he recognized his good faith and confessed there that his said brother Alexander had no right or legal title to the *Maison Dieu* [Domus Dei] near Elgin, nor to it, but that he occupied it for the time being due to the violent intrusion of his lord father. And the Maison Dieu itself was for the collation and provision of the Bishop of Moray alone, without the need of any other person to question it, ecclesiastical or secular, and that the [right of] presentation of any patron, also belonged and ought to belong to the Lord our King. Wherefore he released the Maison Dieu and its detention, which his said brother had unjustly seized, for the time being into the hands of the said Lord Bishop, and resigned it purely and simply. And the Lord Bishop without hesitation restored to the discreet man Lord Adam, himself the true and ancient master of the Maison Dieu, but he himself for the time being robbed, restored to him with all his appurtenances also through the kindness of the aforesaid Count. Upon all of which the same Adam requested through me the undersigned notary public to draw up a public instrument or instruments.

Enacted within the Church of Moray [cathedral] on the year, indication, month, day and pontifical year noted above, in the presence of the venerable Master William de Chesholme [Chisholm], treasurer; John de Arde, succentor; William Garland, subdeacon; Alexander de Urchard, canon of Moray; William de Camera, rector of the church of Turreth [Turriff] in Aberdeen diocese; and a large

²⁷ The *Bridge of Spey* was at Boharm where the Hospital of St Nicholas was situated on the east bank of the River Spey.

number of other people who were specially summoned as witnesses by permission. And I, William de Spyny, clerk of Moray diocese, notary public by imperial authority, the notary of the premisses to each and every one, while it is permitted to act and be done together with the aforesaid witnesses, I was present, and I saw and heard them being done in this way, and through another notary, each and every one of the foregoing, while it is foreordained to act and take place together with the aforesaid witnesses, I was present, and saw and heard them so done.

Reflitutio et Renuntiatio Alexandri de Dunbar •

In nomine Domini amen • Noverint univerfi quod anno Domini • m^o ccc^o nonagesimo tertio • indictione -ii[^] menfis Septembris die • xxi pontificatus domini Clementis Pape feptimi anno • xv reverendo in Chrifto patre domino Alexandro Dei gratia epifcopo Moravienfi fedente pro tribunali • in mei notarii publici infracripti et fubfcriptorum teftium ad hoc fpecialiter rogatorura prefentia • propter hoc perfonaliter conftitutus magnificus dominus et potens dominus Thomas de Dunbar comes Moravie procurator nobilis viri Alexandri de Dunbar fratris fui germani ut dicebat de ipfius Alexandri fpeciali mandato volens agnofcere bonam fidem recognovit et confeffus eft ibidem didlum fratrem fuum Alexandrum nullum jus nec [titulum] juris habuiffe vel habere in Domo Dei juxta Elgyn nec ad eam • fed ex violenta intrufione domini patris fui eam pro tempore occupaffe • ipfamque Domum Dei ad collationem et provifionem Epifcopi Moravienfis folum et in folidum • abfque requifitione cujufcunque alterius perfone ecclefiastice vel fecularis vel prefentatione cujufcunque patroni etiam Domini noftri Regis • pertinuisse pertinere et pertinere debere • unde ipfam Domum Dei et ipfius detentionem quam dictus frater fuus injufte occupavit pro tempore in manibus dicti domini Epifcopi dimifit et pure fimpliciter et libere refignavit • Et dominus Epifcopus incontinenter ibidem difcretum virum dominum Adam de Dundurkhus verum et antiquum ipfius Domus Dei magiftrum • fed ipfa pro tempore fpoilatum • reftituit ad ipfam cum pertinentiis fuis univerfis • de benevolentia etiam Comitis fupradicti • fuper quibus omnibus idem dominus Adam petiit per me notarium publicum infracriptum fibi publicum fieri infrumentum feu publica infrumenta • Acta fuerunt hec in ecclefia Moravienfi anno • indictione • menfe • die et pontificatu quibus fupra • prefentibus venerabilibus viris dominis et magiftris Willelmo de Chefholme thefaurario • Johanne de Arde fuccentore • Willelmo Garland fubdecano • Alexandro de Urcharde canonico ecclefie Moravienfis • Willelmo de Camera rectore ecclefie de Turreth Aberdonenfis dyocefeos • et alia hominum multitudine copiofa • teftibus ad premiffa fpecialiter invocatis • Et ego Willelmus de Spyneto clericus Moravienfis dyocefis publicus auctoritate imperiali notarius premiffis omnibus et fingulis dura ut premittitur agerentur et fierent una cum predictis teftibus prefens

interfui eaque fic fieri vidi et audivi et per alium • me impedito • fcripta in hanc publicam formam redegi fignoque meo et fubfcriptione fignavi rogatus in teftimonium veritatis premifforum.

This charter relates:

- ✦ that the Maison Dieu had been appropriated and wrongly occupied by Alexander Dunbar at some date previous to this charter and that the Master of the Maison Dieu, Adam de Dundurkas, had been 'put out.'

Source 4: OS Name Books, Morayshire, volume 11. [[OS1/12/11/22](#)]

10th November, 1868.

On this day, Captain G.H. Bolland of the Royal Engineers, in completing the Ordnance Survey Name Book for the parish of Elgin, recorded of the Maison Dieu that,

“This was an hospital established for administering hospitality to pilgrims and strangers, as well as for dispensing charity to the native poor - It was burned to the ground by the Wolfe of Badenoch at the same time as he fired the Cathedral and nothing of it remains except the site, which has been preserved - The lands attached to this hospital were by- "James VI by Royal Charter, dated last of February 1620 granted to the Provost, bailies, & Councillors of the burgh of Elgin and their Successors, by virtue of which a Beidhouse has been erected for the support of the beidmen.”

Source 5: [Black's Morayshire Directory \(1863\), p. 92.](#)

1863

THE MAISONDIEU ENDOWMENT.

After the Reformation, the Preceptory of Maisondieu having fallen to the Crown, James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England, by Royal Charter of Confirmation, dated the last day of February, 1620, granted to the Provost, Bailies, Councillors, and community of Elgin, and their successors, the Hospice or House of Preceptory of Maisondieu, lying adjacent to the said burgh, founded for the aliment and support of certain poor and needy persons, with the right of patronage to the same ; together with all lands, tenements, rents, &c, &c, belonging thereto, and of which the preceptor and bidmen thereof were in possession at any former period ; together with the town and lands of Over and Nether Manbeen and Haugh of Manbeen, the lands of Over and Nether Kirdells [Kirdells], the lands of Over and Nether Pittensear [Pittensair], for the support of certain poor and needy persons, according to the original establishment thereof; and also to maintain and support a teacher of music, properly qualified, to instruct the youth within said burgh in music and other liberal arts, and also to answer and promote the affairs of the said burgh, because the common revenue was barely sufficient for its own purposes. The lands of

Maisondieu were accordingly appropriated by the magistrates for the purposes designed by the charter. No evidence can be found that those of Manbeen, Kirdels, and Pittensear had ever been in their actual possession; but the charter gives right to the casualties²⁸ of these lands payable at the time to the hospital of Maisondieu, the *Dominium utile* being in the hands of lay proprietors. The lands of Maisondieu contained 29 acres, 2 roods, and six falls. The present rent of the land is £101 6s. 4d., besides £82 7s. 1d. of a feu-rent, being, in all, £183 13s. 5d. sterling.

A bidhouse was erected at the east end of the burgh in 1624, to contain four poor persons, with a piece of garden ground attached. This building having become ruinous, a new bidhouse was erected by the Magistrates and Council in 1846. Each bidman, besides the accommodation of house and garden, receives £10 10s. per annum.

The present incumbents are— Alexander Christie, James Glass, Andrew Laing, and John Mitchell.

Source 6: [Mackintosh, L. \(1891\) *Elgin Past and Present*, p. 28-9.](#)

1624

THE BEDEMEN'S HOUSES .

Passing a short distance westward, along South College Street, the Bede - Houses are come to, standing on the left hand or south side of the street. These alms-houses, when first instituted, were placed under the care of the fraternity having control over all the revenues of the Maison Dieu, by a deed granted in 1235, by " Prince Lord David , by the favour of God , King of the Scots," and confirmed, and further grants of land made, by the succeeding kings of Scotland, for charitable and other purposes. Previous to the Hospital, erected in 1624, on the site now occupied by the present Bedemen's Houses, the people for whom the benefit was intended inhabited an Hospital which stood near to the Preceptory of Maison Dieu. The receivers of this charity were called Beidmen, from the circumstance of each wearing a string of beads round his neck, and their employment was to utter every twenty-four hours as many prayers or pious ejaculations for the souls of benefactors as there were beads on their strings. The properties granted by the kings of Scotland in support of the Maison Dieu and the dependencies thereon are sorely reduced through the greed of the old neighbouring lairds working on the ignorance and fears of the magistrates of those bygone centuries; and by such means not only have the poor been despoiled, but the educational resources of the city have been greatly reduced.

Source 6: [Mackintosh, H.B. \(1914\) *Elgin Past and Present*, p. 28-9.](#)

1624

THE BEDEMEN'S HOUSES .

Continuing along South College Street, the Bede Houses are come to on the left or south side of the street. These almshouses when first erected were under the fraternity having control over all the revenues of the Maison Dieu, and were situated near the Preceptory. After these lands were granted to the town, as mentioned on p. 124, the Magistrates built a house here in 1624, and on its becoming ruinous the present Bede House was erected in 1846. Over the central doorway is a tablet bearing the inscription as illustrated. Out of the revenues from the Lands of Maison Dieu £18 yearly is paid to each of four bedemen (decayed burgesses), who with their wives lodge here. The receivers

²⁸ *Casualties* – which are a feature of land held in feu, are certain payments made to the superior that are contingent on the happening of certain events. The most important was the payment of an amount equal to one year's feu-duty by a new holder, whether heir or purchaser of the feu.

of this charity were called Bedemen from the circumstance of wearing a string of beads, and their employment was to utter every twenty-four hours as many prayers for the souls of their benefactors, as there were beads on the string. After the Reformation their quiet life was no sinecure as in 1638 we find, in the Town's Books, " The beadsmen ordeant to keip the Kirk dayly at morning and evening prayers or otherwyse salbe put out of their place." In 1788 the Town Council supplied the Bedemen with blue gowns, but this distinctive dress has for long been discontinued.



Figure 3: Rubbing of the Plaque which was placed on the Bede House at Elgin.

The translation reads: "The hospital of the Burgh of Elgin was founded by the same – 1624" and the inscription continues, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." (Psalm 41, V. 1). Underneath this plaque was another inscription stating that the building had been -

"• Rebuilt • AD. = M.D.CCXXII."

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Maps.

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