

The Hammermen appoint first woman Deacon

Dr Carol Marsh, OBE, has been appointed Deacon of the Hammermen of Edinburgh. She is the first woman appointed to the post since the guild was incorporated in 1483.

Dr Marsh is an electronic engineer and an alumnus of now fewer than five Scottish universities – Edinburgh Napier, Heriot-Watt, Strathclyde, Glasgow and Edinburgh. She was also admitted to the Scottish Engineering Hall of Fame last year and is described as a true pioneer in her field. She was awarded the OBE for her work in “Diversity and Inclusion in Electronic Engineering”.

It may sound like a pop group but the Incorporation of Hammermen of Edinburgh is a trade body with a long history, and Dr Marsh confirmed to us the Edinburgh organisation is now looking for new members. She herself found the Hammermen when looking for a body which would enhance her own career.

She said: “The requirement is to have a degree or relevant qualifications in your field and have been working in that for five years. And importantly you need to have a passion for Edinburgh. There are Hammermen all over Scotland but you have to have a love for our city. I became a member of the Deacon’s Committee but I didn’t realise that meant I would eventually become Deacon. I looked up the records and found that I would be the first female Deacon which is pretty extraordinary.” Carol is also the Vice President of the Institution of Engineers and Technology.

Carol continued: "Ten per cent of engineers are women and very few get to high positions because they end up leaving. That is one of the thing I want to do is increase the number of members. There are 5,000 engineers in Edinburgh and we only have 56 members so we are trying to promote membership."

In 2024 there are now four Lady Deacons representing five trades – the Hammermen, the Baxters, the Bonnetmakers and Dyers and the Candlemakers.

The Hammermen was historically a trade guild for any Edinburgh artisan who worked with a hammer and with hand. This included blacksmiths, saddlers and clockmakers – and any prospective member must present a masterpiece to prove their skill. Now the body has a charitable arm

"The Incorporation embraced all those who worked on metal with a hammer. They included blacksmiths, farriers, saddlers, lorimers, armourers, cutlers, sword-slippers, girdle-makers, locksmiths, tinsmiths, whiteiron-men, brass-founders, coppersmiths and pewterers. Altogether there were about 20 different disciplines. Later, clock and watchmakers were added to the Incorporation. The goldsmiths and silversmiths were originally members until about 1490-92, when they formed their own separate incorporation."

The Deacons are usually spotted at any civic event in the capital when a procession of those wearing gowns, both trades and academia is required – such as the Riding of the Marches which passes through Holyrood Park and ends on the Royal Mile at the Mercat Cross. This year the Hammermen will be wearing the still relatively new blue robes which were only obtained last year, and which was one of Carol's key aims on taking office.

The Deacon said that her mission statement includes obtaining a chain of office, which Carol is currently investigating. (With members who are jewellers she believes this will be an

easy fix.) Another job on the to do list is to obtain an updated coat of arms and write down a succession plan. She has also made the first two awards of tool tokens to students of Edinburgh College under their revived apprenticeship award scheme.

The Hammermen raise money through their annual membership fees and donations, which is another reason why they need more members. [If you would like to join then contact the organisation through its website.](#)

Celestia

Dr Marsh explained to us the work she does with Celestia. Their project centres around communication with satellites. She said: "The satellites we are talking to are called Low Earth orbit satellites. They are whizzing around the earth about 16 times a day to connect to the internet. But every satellite needs a parabolic dish – and at the moment there are 11,000 satellites growing to around 55,000 by 2030. So what we have done is replace the need for dishes with a pyramid shape installation which has the top chopped off. This has sensors all around it and it can communicate with up to 56 satellites at the same time. It is about four metres by four so half the size of any parabolic dishes. It can also sit on the top of the data centre getting rid of the need for miles of cable. We are the world leaders in that technology."

Magdalen Chapel

The Hammermen used to own the Magdalen Chapel in Cowgate which they used as their convening hall and headquarters from 1547 until 1858. On the board outside the chapel is also described as the Headquarters of The Scottish Reformation Society.

There is a Deacon's Chair in the chapel and it is a fascinating place to visit. If you want to organise a private

tour then this can be arranged by contacting a member of the volunteer staff info@scottishreformationssociety.org or 07857 472 394.

The chair was made by Thomas Heron of Cowgate who charged £33 13 shillings for it in 1708. It has since been restored using Russian leather from the period which was salvaged from the wreck of the Metta Catharina which went down in 1786 off the coast of Cornwall.

Dr Marsh is Engineering Director at the Scottish satellite communications firm, Celestia, which has its base in Edinburgh. The company does not actually install satellites in space, but it is in charge of the ground control. The company announced an exciting development this year with its ground terminal. This is around 20 square metres and can be installed on city centre roof tops and connect to multiple satellites – some of which, for example, are responsible for taking broadband to more rural locations. The company said this new terminal without the need for reflector antennas will “bring global connectivity one step closer”.



Dr Carol Marsh



Dr Carol Marsh at the Kicking of the Deacon