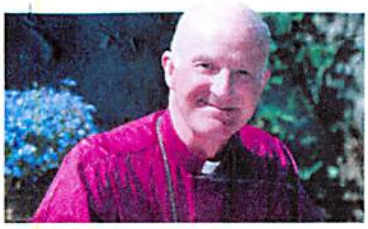
Two Bishops & their Mitres



Right Revd Bob Gillies

Right Revd Thomas Claggett

Two hat makers, on two different continents, two centuries apart, were each asked to make mitres for bishops. In the late 1890s, mitres were certainly not worn in Episcopal America. Samuel Seabury, was the only bishop at that time to have a traditional mitre made, he was so proud of his consecration in 1784 as first bishop of the

The Original Claggett Mitre made around a 'stove' hat by Seabury's daughter, Maria

American Episcopal Church. The old proverb, '*Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery*,' may be applicable to Thomas John Claggett of Maryland, the 'only member of the American Episcopate upon whom Seabury was allowed to lay consecrating hands. (Because Seabury's Scottish line did not find favour south of New England, he was denied uniting with others to create a bishop until near the end of his life when three of the English line were available in the United States.) Then Claggett was consecrated on 17th September 1792, in Trinity Church, New York City, being fully aware of the fact not only that he was the first consecrated in America by an American hierarchy but only for the first time, the Scottish and English lines had converged. Claggett's desire for a mitre like Seabury's is significant. Both mitres survive to this day and are identical being converted silk stove-type hats with the brims removed and crowns partly cut out. Claggett's moreover was made for him by Seabury's daughter Maria.

Robert Gillies [Bob to all] bishop-elect to the See of Aberdeen & Orkney, was listening to the radio one night, when he heard the story of a hat maker who had emigrated from America to Fair Isle.

Tommy with the mitre

Bob decided, if he needed a mitre made, it should be made within the congregation of the diocese, and Fair Isle coming within the diocese, this hat maker would be just the job! Tommy was his name and much to his surprise, as Bob didn't know the wacky hats that Tommy made for his clients, he accepted the challenge and set about finding the style, design and materials required for the job. In the same way as 200 years ago, Tommy had to put in a bit of research and Bob sent materials and an old mitre for shape and size. Tommy did manage to finish in time for Bob's consecration in Aberdeen on Saturday 22nd September 2007.

Bishop Bob wearing the Mitre and Stole

However, the commission continued, as Bob had also asked for a stole to be made and therefore Rachel Eunson of the Fair Isle Craft Co-op was recruited to collaborate in its manufacture.

Rachel Eunson making the Stole

She chose traditional Fair Isle patterns using the colours symbolical of Christianity. The eight-foot long knitted portion was sewn together onto the backing material achieving a result of which all were proud. As Tommy said later, "*Good thing it was Radio —if Bob had seen my Puffin hats he might have had second thoughts…*"

Stuart Donald