

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

650 Fisgard St, Victoria, B.C. Canada

“A Family Called Sinclair”

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by

R. W. Bro. David Ritchie

Discovery Lodge No.149

P. D. D. G. M. District 19 G .R B.C. & Y

P. M. Peace Lodge No. 126

Life Member St George Lodge 503 (Scottish Constitution)

When I first offered to make this presentation I didn't realize what I was getting into. I had read enough about the Sinclair's to know that they had been deeply embroiled in Freemasonry for a long time. How deeply I could never have imagined.

Let me quote an article that appeared in a Scottish newspaper a couple of years ago.

Dateline: Jan. 14th 2001:

“A Scottish tourist who died in Israel may have been murdered because of his involvement in an organization that dates back to Robert the Bruce and the Crusades. It is believed that Alisdair Rosslyn Sinclair had his heart removed as part of a medieval ritual.”

Originally from Arran, Mr. Sinclair made an unexplained visit to Israel in April of 1988. He was arrested as he tried to leave the country and died in police custody. When his body was returned to Scotland, an autopsy found that his heart was missing.

The official version of events stated that Mr. Sinclair hanged himself in a police cell, that his heart had been taken for an autopsy and later misplaced.

At the time of his death Sinclair was a resident of Amsterdam who made his living making and selling guitars”

The article goes on to say that Sinclair was a member of the Rosslyn branch of that family which had helped to found the original Knights Templar and that “The order is embroiled in an international battle for control of the holy sites in Jerusalem”

James Sinclair, the younger brother of Alisdair, said “He knew all about our Knights Templar background. He and I were told about our heritage by our father when we were young boys, and we often visited Rosslyn Chapel.’

A spokesman for Militi Templi Scotia, the Scottish Knights Templar admitted “We are currently involved in an attempt to remove control of the holy sites of Jerusalem from the Israeli government. We believe that they should be administered by the United Nations and we are working with the U.N. and N.A.T.O. to achieve that goal”

The Israeli journalist Barry Chamish investigated the occurrence, later making the statement “In

my opinion he was murdered, and his killing is linked to a greater conspiracy. Alisdair Rosslyn Sinclair was murdered because of his bloodline”

Now, at first glance this all seemed very outrageous to me. I knew that the Knights Templar in Scotland were a pretty elitist group, but for them to have any pull with an organization like the United Nations was, I thought, a bit too much to believe and I put the whole thing out of my mind. That is until I met someone who brought it back to mind,

That person was Brother L. D. Cooper, Curator of the Grand Lodge of Scotland’s Museum and Library, when he visited this Lodge and regaled us with his presentation on “An Account of the Chapel of Roslin, 1778”, a booklet published in that year and recently re - printed by the Grand Lodge of Scotland. At the end of his presentation I approached him and asked him about the incident that I had read about in “The Sunday Post”. He was very quick to dismiss it as nonsense and said that Alisdair Sinclair had been arrested in Israel for trying to smuggle illegal drugs out of the country and had hung himself while in the throws of withdrawal. He added that ‘THE FAMILY is very upset about the whole affair. I bought one of the wee books and went on home, having made the decision that the Sinclairs needed looking into.

Looking into the Sinclairs is only difficult in deciding what you should keep and what you should throw away; there is no dearth of material. I decided to start at their beginnings and their beginnings were about 610 A.D. when a man by the name of Fornjot was the ruler of a land called Kvenland. It was his son Kari who conquered Norway and started the line from which the Sinclairs are descended. By the year 810 A.D. a descendant of Kari’s, Eystein “The Clatterer” who lived in Mawre, Norway had two sons and the eldest Rognvald became the first Jarl (Earl) of Orkney and his brother, Sigurd added Caithness to the lands that the family controlled on behalf of King Harold of Norway

In the year 860 King Harold began to consolidate his realm and many of the lesser nobility, the sons and cousins of the Jarls were forced out of their holdings and into commerce and raiding, In effect they became Vikings. Rollo, the son of Rognvald was one of these. He raided along the North coast of France and took possession of large tracts of land there. After 38 years as a Viking, Rollo signed a treaty with the king of France which gave him control of what became Normandy and he would be its first Duke. This treaty was signed in 911 at a place called St. Clair-sur Epte and one branch of Rollo’s descendants who remained there took the name of the place as their surname and it is said that at the battle of Hastings in 1066, 9 St. Clairs fought at the side of their cousin, William the Conqueror.

The first St. Clair to arrive in Scotland was William the Seemly, who had accompanied Princess Margaret from Hungary to be married to King Malcolm 111 of Scotland in 1068. It was she who brought with her a piece of the Holy Cross and founded Holyrood Abbey. For his services William was given the lands of Rosslyn in Midlothian in “life rent”. Later the lands were given in “free heritage” to his son, this branch became the “Rosslyn Barons” and it was they who built Rosslyn Chapel.

The son of William the Seemly was Known as Sir Henry the Crusader and it was he who joined Godfrey de Boullion on the 1st. Crusade in 1096 and it is very likely that because of The example

of Sir Henry and their ties to the Templars, that succeeding generations of Sinclairs would have a strong desire to go to the Holy land, either as a Crusader or as a Pilgrim.

To keep this paper in reasonable proportions let us take a quick look at the generations that followed immediately after Sir Henry

The third Baron was also a Henry. He was made Baron of Pentland and was knighted by King David 1st. And was the Kings ambassador to England during an attempt to regain Northumberland. He added Cardain to the family holdings.

William the 4th Baron was the first St. Clair to live at Rosslyn. William the 6th Baron married Matilda the Daughter of Magnus the Jarl of Orkney and thus, after 300 odd years, reunited the two families descended from good old Rognvald the Mighty.

Remember that during this time the St. Clairs in France as well as those in Scotland had been deeply involved with the Knights Templar and had indeed provided that body with two of its Grand masters. It is not, therefore, surprising that an excommunicated King Robert the Bruce should ask his henchman Henry St. Clair (Sinclair) to go to Portugal and with promises of land in a safe haven, bring the Templars who had fled there, back to Scotland and participate in the struggle for the freedom of the Scottish realm. It is even less surprising that after Bannockburn a grateful king should bestow more honours on what had become the most powerful family in the country, other than the royal family itself.

If we now go back to when Hughs de Payens, the founding Master of the Knights Templar, we find him visiting his in-laws in Scotland and returning to France with his Brother - in- law Henry St. Clair and then on to Jerusalem as Poor Fellow Soldiers Of Christ. The year was 1118 A.D.

It is worthwhile noting that the constitution of the Order of Knights Templar was drawn up by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a Cistercian monk. As you will see, the Cistercians played quite a role in the rebuilding of Scotland, at a later date.

On Friday the 13th of October, 1307, when the king of France thought that he could relieve himself of the horrendous burden of debt that he had got himself into, by confiscating the treasury of the Templars and dissolving the Order: he was sadly mistaken, not only had the cash disappeared but so had a majority of the Templars, and their fleet had sailed from the port of St. Rochelle during the night.

It is not a matter of conjecture, it is a fact, that most of the ships sailed for Caithness in Scotland, where the family of one of their progenitors waited to give them safe haven in a land that had been proscribed by the papacy. The King, Robert the first (Bruce) was an excommunicate because he had killed his rival within the confines of a church. It is also a fact that many of the Knights escaped to Portugal, and stayed there under the protection of the Portuguese royal family and where a new order of chivalry was founded, known simply as the Order of Christ.

When the St. Clair of Scotland travelled to meet the Santa Clara of Portugal and recruit the Knights on behalf of his king, Robert the Bruce. Rather than taking them to Caithness , he landed them on the western shores of Argyle. The Lord High Admiral of the Isles, Angus Og

MacDonald then guided them through the glens of the West Highlands to Stirling, where they arrived when the battle was at its height and, as yet, undecided. The sight of a brand new fighting force of armoured knights, augmented by Angus Og's Highlanders was enough to strike fear into the hearts of the English, who then fled the field. Sinclair of Rosslyn is known to have fought by Bruce's side during the battle and we presume that it was Sinclair of Caithness who escorted the knights from Portugal

The Bruce was a wise ruler, and knowing that if he was going to succeed at consolidating his kingdom and removing the threat of English invasion, he would have to reconcile with the church. He also knew that doing so would put his Templar allies at risk, so with the help of his staunchest supporters, the Sinclairs, he founded the Order of Heredom, The Royal Order of Scotland, and The Brothers of the Rosie Cross.

During the wars of independence when Wallace and Bruce were struggling for a free Scotland, the Sinclairs had been instrumental in the humiliating defeat of an English army of 30,000 men by a Scottish force of only 8,000. It was 1303 and this was the battle of Roslin, after which the surviving 10% of the English force were returned home, only after having sworn an oath never to take arms against Scotland again. Suffice to say that during the time that the Sinclair family had made their home in Scotland, they had built themselves quite a reputation as patriotic defenders of the realm

In 1320, both Magnus of Orkney and Henry Sinclair of Rosslyn were present when the Jarls, Earls, Barons and Bishops of Scotland assembled at Arbroath Abbey to write a letter to the Pope asking for the remission of the interdiction against Bruce. I quote a part of that letter

“But at length it pleased God, who can only heal after wounds, to restore us to our liberty, from these calamities, by our serene prince, king and lord Robert, who, for the delivering of his people and his own rightful inheritance from the enemies hand, did, like another Joshua or Maccabeus, did most willingly undergo all manner of toil, fatigue, hardship and hazard. The Divine Providence, the right of succession by the laws and customs of the kingdom (which we will defend ‘til death) and due and lawful consent of the people, made him our king and prince. To him we are obliged and resolved to adhere in all things, both in account of his right and his own merit, as being the person who has restored the people's safety in defense of their liberties. But after all, if this prince shall leave these principles that he hath so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our kingdom be subjected to the king or people of England, we will immediately endeavor to expel him as our enemy and as the subverter of his own and our rights, and we will make another king, who will defend our liberties: for as long as there shall be one hundred of us remain alive we will never consent to subject ourselves to the dominion of the English. For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honours, but it is liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which no honest man will lose but with his life.

This then is the declaration of Arbroath and is the document which was used by the Masonic Founding Fathers of the United States to base their own Declaration of Independence on.

Henry Sinclair of Rosslyn, who was a signator of the Declaration of Arbroath, had two sons. In 1330 William died in a battle with the Moors, in Spain, while he was on a mission, with James, Earl of

Douglas, to carry Bruce's heart to the Holy Land. His other son James was he who married Isabella, daughter of the Jarl of Orkney, and a direct descendant of Rognvald, thus uniting the two families after four hundred years.

After hundreds of years of almost constant war in Scotland, Bruce had a very hard time starting an effective building program, for all practical purposes there were no tradesmen left to do any of the rebuilding that was required. Edward of England had not been known as the Hammer of the Scots without reason. He had razed buildings, ravaged the country side destroyed documents pertaining to the Scottish state and killed everyone who had the temerity to bear arms against him, excepting, of course the nobility and royalty who could pay ransom . Thus there were no tradesmen left to do the building, and, therefore must be imported . They came from France, Italy, Germany and England, to rebuild the cathedrals, abbeys, palaces and castles of Scotland. Walter Fitz Allan, Lord High Stewart of Scotland, who's descendants took the surname Stewart, was involved in many building projects, notably the Abbey Church of Killwinning, Henry Sinclair rebuilt Rosslyn Castle and similar edifices were being constructed all across the country in places like Paisley ,Edinburgh, Perth and smaller centers such as Melrose, Dunfermline and Kelso. All of these Buildings, all constructed of stone, needed a lot of Stonemasons to build them. Taking literally years to construct, accommodations had to be provided and they had to be of a substantial nature.

One of the more progressive persons having works done was the Baron Sinclair of Rosslyn. He had the workers build themselves a village, To accommodate the masons, their tylers and helers, as well as their families, when they married locally or brought their brides from their homelands. Maybe this was the reason that caused Bruce to bestow the title of "Lord Protector of Masons" on Sir Henry Sinclair.

Please bear in mind that the large majority of the Abbeys being built at this time were to be occupied by the Cistercian Order of monks whose founder was St. Bernard of Clairveau. The man who wrote the discipline for the Knights Templar. Also The Knights Templar gave up the management of their Scottish properties to the Hospitalers, but never ceded ownership of them. I think that you can see a process being put in place to make the Templars invisible. I submit that Bruce and Sinclair contrived to give the Templars a new identity and, when the foreign masons were recruited to build the abbeys for the monks whose order had been the template for their own monastic rule, a meeting place within the mason's lodges

After Bruce died of leprosy and William Sinclair died in Spain, his son, another William, is married to Matilda of Orkney and is later killed fighting for the Teutonic Knights in Lithuania. Their son, Henry, inherited the titles of Rosslyn but had to litigate for the titles of Orkney. In the year 1379 King Haakon of Norway invested Henry de St. Clair, Baron of Rosslyn and lord High Admiral of Scotland, with all the hereditary and honours of the ancient Jarls of Orkney and Caithness, and the lordship of Shetland, making him the premier Jarl of Norway. Now owing allegiance to both crowns, Henry became very powerful and because his domain extended from Caithness and Sutherland to the Faeroe Islands and Iceland, including some of the Outer Hebrides and a few pieces of land on the mainland of Norway, He could control access to the north Atlantic from central Europe. This made him one of the most powerful men in Northern Europe. His titles included Prince of Orkney, Earl of Caithness, Lord Shetland, Baron of this that and the other, Lord Admiral of the Scots seas, Lord Chief Justice of Scotland, also Lord Protector of Scottish Masons.

By the late 1390's there were a lot of Templars in Caithness who were living under the protection of Prince Henry and there was rumored to be a crusade being mounted against them, they needed a place to be, where they could be safe. Prince Henry, from his Norse heritage, new of Vinland (Greenland) and the tales of the lands to the west. He caused to be built, a fleet of twelve ships, loaded them with Knights Templar and set sail towards the west. Stopping in the Faeroes for supplies and in Greenland because of storms they came at last to Nova Scotia where they made a settlement. From there they explored the country around, traveling as far as Maine and Massachuset. At Wexford, his friend James Dunn died and his effigy, carved in stone, is there to this day. There are other artifacts, the fourteenth century cannon and building foundations that have been discovered in the Louisbourg area, for instance, confirm the fact that Europeans were there at that time. When we take into account "The Zeno Narrative" and the Orkney Scroll, it seems a given that these Europeans were the Sinclair expedition. Prince Henry returned to Scotland and never visited the settlement again. He was murdered in 1404 by a raiding party ascribed to the Hanseatic League, who were jealous of his control over the Amber, salt, fish and timber, coming in from the North Atlantic. It was also the Hanseatic League that thwarted his sons attempt to gain the throne of Norway. This son, William, is best known as the founder of the chapel at Rosslyn in 1446 and it was he who was given the HEREDITARY Title of Lord Protector of Scottish Masons and became the first Earl of Caithness, under Scottish law, even though he was the thirty-ninth holder of the title. James the First of Scotland was a reformer who introduced many new laws covering everything from finance to fishing and William Sinclair was given the task of ensuring that these laws, as they pertained to the building trades, were enforced.

There has been a lot of controversy about The Sinclairs claiming to be hereditary Grand Masters, but the fact is that was the only person able to claim that distinction, all other titles whether Lord Protector or Master of Works were bestowed by the sovereign and did not necessarily conflict in the duties that they performed.

The building of Rosslyn Chapel and the repair of Rosslyn castle took many years and the village became a permanent home to many of the foreign craftsmen who had been brought in to do the work. I am sure that this is true of many large building sites in both Scotland and England at that time. For social interaction, I am sure that the builders used their Ludge, which was probably the closest thing to a public building available to them. When visitations took place between Luges, as would inevitably happen, how better to recognize one another as fellow Masons but with a word known only to masons, a password, the Mason Word. As time went by, organization and rules of order would become necessary to preserve order, decorum and harmony. What you would then have was a Masonic Lodge

As I am sure you all know, Rosslyn is adorned, almost completely, with carvings, some of which are distinctly pagan, some Christian, some Templar in origin and others distinctly masonic. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the architect or patron was leaving a history of his families roots ?. To me this indicates that a certain harmony existed between the builder, his masons and the organization that he and his ancestors had belonged to for over 400 years , The knights Templar, who were under Papal interdiction and who could not meet openly lest they be recognized for what they were.

The Green Man of Paganism, the icons and saints of Christianity, the heraldic bearings of the Templars and many symbols of Masonry along with the carvings of maize and aloe, proof of his fathers visit to the Americas, proliferate throughout Rosslyn Chapel. In the crypt or vault that lies beneath a flagstone on the chapel floor, lies the burial place of nine succeeding Sinclair Barons of Rosslyn, buried in their armour, without coffins, in the Templar tradition.

I see here the tradition of accepting others than masons into lodges being started and the tradition of nobility seeking acceptance into a fraternity of working men being initiated. It was not too long after the completion of the collegiate church of Rosslyn, that, in 1483, in a record of Aberdeen Lodge it is reported that on June 27th. Six masouns of the ludge were reprimanded for dissensions, that they would be fined if they did it again and expelled if they continued. A city statute of Edinburgh dated 1491 also refers to a luge when “the maister maisoun is given the hours that he and his men must work on St. Giles Parish Church and how the brethren must be given recreatioun between the hours of 4.00 and 4.30 p.m.

During the next hundred years the Sinclairs did not seem to put very much score on being patrons and protectors of the craft and indeed, one of them apologized to the craft for being negligent in his duties. In 1598 the man who had been appointed Master of Works to the King and Warden General of the Masons Craft set down the first of his statutes for the masons lodges of Scotland and rewrote them a year later to accommodate the Lodge of Kilwinning. These statutes and ordinances set out the way that a lodge should be run and the way masons should conduct themselves within and without the lodges. These were the Schaw Statutes, and were written for operative masons at a time when lodges were becoming more and more speculative. And so it was that just two years after, there came the first of the St. Clair Charters, these were designed to regulate the Lodges of Free and Accepted Masons, the hereditary protectors of Scottish Masons had once more fulfilled their obligation to the craft. The second St. Clair Charter was written in 1662 and became the document that recognized them as Hereditary Grand Masters of the craft, this document was signed by the Masters of Lodges from all over the country; Aberdeen, Stirling, Dundee and Aitchison Haven being, among others signatories to it.

I think that the argument being bruted around these days, which maintains that the Sinclairs were never appointed or elected Grand Masters of Scottish masons is frivolous. The King was James IV of Scotland and I of Great Britain, a man who ruled without the benefit of a parliament for eleven years, who’s right it was to appoint Grand Masters, would never have condoned the use of that title without that he had approved it. Lets face it, it was the time when the rich and famous, not only in Scotland, but in England as well, started to emulate their Templar friends and seek entrance into masonic lodges. The Sinclair Charters were the instriments that regulated the governance of these integrated lodges until the Grand Lodge era.

Freemasonry seemed to do quite well in the interim. The minutes of the Lodge of Aitchison Haven which go back to 1598, record, over a period of two and a half centuries, how it evolved from a purely operative to an integrated lodge of both operative and accepted masons. The Lodge of Mary’s Chapel in Edinburgh was in existence when the Edinburgh Incorporation of Wrights and Masons was chartered in 1475 and it’s minute books go all the way back to 1598, and attest to the fact that John Boswell the Laird of Auchenleck was a “maister” of the lodge in the year 1600. This was forty six years before Elias Ashmole was inducted into the Lodge of Warrington

in England. A few of the other non-operative masons who joined Mary's Chapel were ;The Viscount of Canada, Lord Alexander in 1634; General Alexander Hamilton, The Earl of Marchmount; the Right Hon. William Murray, the Justice Depute of Scotland. One admission worthy of notewas the Right Hon. Mr. Moray, General quartermaster of the Army of Scotland, on May 20th.1641. This happened at Newcastle when a battle was about to take place, however when the field lodge was formed and English Masons arrived to participate, the battle was called off. This is the same Robt Murray who was a founding member of The Royal Society in London. So it seems to me that 400 years ago working men were sitting "on the level" with rich merchants, church dignitaries, and peers of the realm, in much the same way as they sit on the level with the Duke of Kent today

Masonically the last Sinclair that I want ti talk about was William Sinclair of Rosslyn, the descendant of the two William St. Clairs who received the charters in 1600 and 1628 from the Masons of Scotland, naming them Grand Masters. He was the last of the line and was initiated into Lodge Cannongate Kilwinning on May 18th.1736. Later in that year he was proposed for office of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Those running against him were, the Earl of Home, Master of the Kilwinning Scots Arms and Lord Crawford, a northern choice for the office

On St. Andrews day1736, Grand Lodge met in the Lodge room of St Mary's Chapel. It was resolved that all lodges holding to the Grand Lodge should be enrolled according to their seniority, which should be determined from the authentic records and documents which they produced. Those producing none to be put to the end of the roll. 33 Lodges were represented. When everyone was gathered in the lodge room William Sinclair of Rosslyn stood up and renounced his hereditary rights in a nice little speech that captivated those present with its magnanimity, including the group who were going to support Lord Home and William Sinclair of Rosslyn was elected the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland

The young Alisdair Rosslyn Sinclair had indeed a noble bloodline that had been involved in a lot of Scottish, English and European history. From battles against the Saracens in the Holy Land to meeting the gentle Mic Mac in Nova Scotia they have left their mark on many peoples in many lands. I can only hope that he meets them in Valhalla and gets the answers to what he sought in Jerusalem.