

The Origins of Freemasonry including Rosslyn Chapel



By

Bro Lee Marsh, Worshipful Master

To Audenshaw Lodge No. 4828

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A Lecture originally given on 25 August 2000, at the 5th International Conference of Great Priors, in The Albert Halls, Stirling, Scotland by Dr Robert Lomas of University of Bradford.

Introduction

This lecture is in the most part a lecture given by Dr Robert Lomas in 2000. I have added some extra notes from mine and others research on “the Origins of Freemasonry and of Rosslyn Chapel” using those materials published after 2000, some of which is from Robert Lomas.

As some of you may be aware I am also a member of the correspondence circle of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in London, which is the leading research centre into Masonic Research in the world. As you can imagine I have many books on Freemasonry, hundreds in fact, and personally own more than 50 books on Freemasonry.

I have presented a number of papers and short talks to lodges and chapters in both East and West Lancashire Provinces and I hope to share some of my learning's and discussion topics that will create further interests in Freemasonry.

I hope you enjoy this lecture and find some of it as intriguing as I have.

One final note, please do not misunderstand this paper as being an absolute 100% proven history, there are others views on this subjects which are just as gripping and plausible, this is just one very real possibility.

Fraternally

Bro Lee Marsh

Worshipful Master 2009-2010

Audenshaw Lodge No. 4828

Where did Freemasonry Start?

Dr Robert Lomas believes Freemasonry, in the form we would recognise today, started at the building of Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh.



Fig. 1.

Rosslyn Chapel, before the present external roof was put in place

Why does he believe this?

There are three important pieces of evidence which support this statement.

1. Rosslyn Chapel links the Jewish Temple through the Knights Templar to Freemasonry.
2. The ground plan of Rosslyn Chapel is a copy of Herod's Temple and above ground it replicates the Herodian Architecture of Jerusalem.
3. Rosslyn Chapel contains the oldest document showing a modern First Degree Ceremony being conducted by a Knight Templar.

The Ground Plan

The layout of Rosslyn Chapel, which was started in 1440, is an exact replica of the ground plan of the Third Temple, built in Jerusalem by Herod and destroyed in the First Century by the Romans.

(See *The Hiram Key*, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, Arrow, London, 1997 for full details)

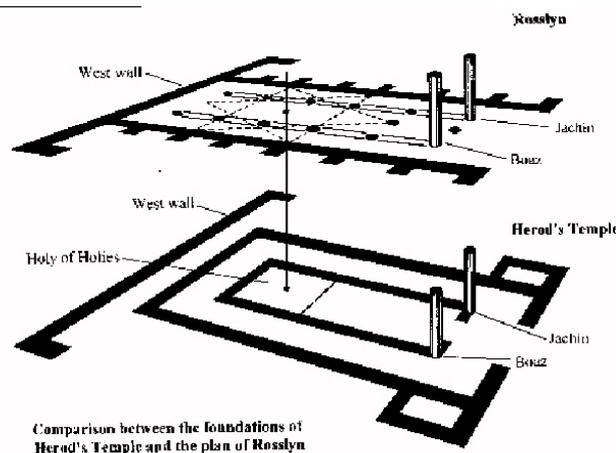


Fig. 2.

The layout of Herod's Temple was not known to Archaeologists until the mid nineteenth century, nearly four hundred years after the construction of Rosslyn Chapel

A Stone Document showing the First Degree of Freemasonry

All the carvings in Rosslyn Chapel were first cut in wood and produced to the Master of Works for inspection before being cut in stone. This is one of the earliest examples of Quality Control in Britain.

On the lower frame of the window in the South West corner of the Chapel there is a carving, which seems to be of a Freemasonic First Degree.

*(See *The Second Messiah, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, Arrow, London, 1998* for full details)*



Fig. 3.1.

This carving shows seven distinct points of similarity to the modern First Degree of Freemasonry, and it was carved between 1440-50. It was inspected and passed before being cut in stone so the features within it are intended to be there.

Is it Just Chance?

John Hamill, at the time was the Librarian (now is Director of Special Projects) of the United Grand Lodge of England, has suggested that it may be just coincidence that this little figure seems to show a link between Templarism and Freemasonry.

The figure shows a man kneeling between two pillars. He is blindfolded and has a running noose about his neck. His feet are in a strange and unnatural posture and in his left hand he holds a bible. The end of the rope about his neck is held by another man who is wearing the mantle of a Knight Templar.

These days the candidate is dressed in a very odd manner but will only be admitted when properly dressed for the ceremony. The way of dressing is to wear rough clothing folded back to reveal particular parts of the body. The candidate is blindfolded and has a running noose about his neck. Fig. 3.2 is a picture of a Masonic candidate who is correctly dressed for the ceremony standing before the two pillars that appear in many Masonic Lodges, even today.

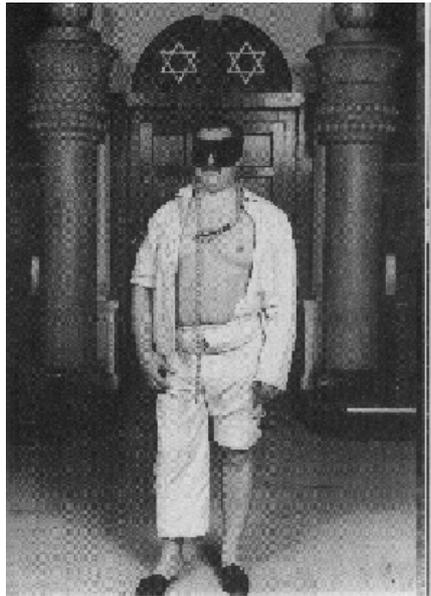


Fig. 3.2.

A Candidate properly prepared to be made a Mason

The statue at Rosslyn Chapel shows a number of features which are now considered to be Masonic. Here is a drawing of the main features of the Statue.



Drawing of the main features of the carving



Fig. 3.3

The problem for John Hamill at the United Grand Lodge of England is that the statue was carved five hundred and fifty nine years ago and this is two hundred and seventy years before the claimed founding of the Craft in England. When Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas published their information it caused a tremendous fuss in English Freemasonry. Many articles were written by various Masonic writers supporting John Hamill's view that these similarities were simply co-incidence.

How, the gentleman from England must have asked themselves, could Freemasonry have come from such an outlandish place as Scotland? :-)
(This lecture was delivered in Stirling surrounded by many Scots, as well as a considerable number of Grand Lodges including UGLE delegates. This statement caused considerable amusement) However, their counter claim of co-incidence can be tested using standard techniques of Hypothesis Testing and here is the detailed calculation.

There are seven points of congruence (agreement) between the carving and the modern Masonic ceremony. These are:

1. The man is blindfolded. This is unusual in medieval statues and the only other example is the figure of blind justice. There are no other blindfold figures carved in Rosslyn Chapel.
2. The man is kneeling. This is fairly common in medieval carvings and there are other kneeling figures in Rosslyn Chapel.
3. The man is holding a bible in his left hand. There are a number of other carvings showing figures holding books or scrolls within Rosslyn Chapel.
4. The man has a noose about his neck. There are few known figures of the period showing nooses about their necks. The best known is the statue called 'The dying Gaul'. There is one other figure in Rosslyn Chapel which has a noose in it and that is the figure of the hanged man which represents the angel Shemhazai whose sins caused God to send the Flood and who was so afraid to face God that he hung himself between heaven and earth with his face away from God. Shemhazai is carved with a noose about his feet but there is no other noose carved in Rosslyn Chapel.
5. The man has his feet in the posture that is still used today by Masonic candidates. This is a very unusual position and does not occur in any other carvings in Rosslyn Chapel.
6. The ceremony is being carried out between two pillars as it is in many Masonic Lodges. Pillars figure in a lot of the carvings at Rosslyn Chapel.
7. The noose is being held by a man clearly dressed as a Templar. There are many Templar symbols and images of Templars carved in Rosslyn Chapel (see fig 4).

So what is the chance of all these factors coming together by chance? Robert Lomas set up a null hypothesis that it was pure co-incidence that all these elements linking Templarism and Freemasonry occurred in the same carving and then set out to test the probability of the idea.

1. The probability that the figure is blindfolded by chance is 0.5 as it can only be blindfolded or not blindfolded. This is a worst-case probability that gives the null hypothesis the best chance of succeeding, as there is no other blindfolded figure in Rosslyn.
2. The probability that the figure is kneeling by chance is 0.5 as it again can only be kneeling or not kneeling.
3. The probability that the figure is holding a bible by chance is 0.5 as there are again only two possibilities. Holding a bible or not holding a bible.
4. The probability that the figure has a noose about its neck by chance is 0.5 even though it is the only figure in Rosslyn with a noose about its

neck. Again Robert Lomas gave the Null Hypothesis the best possible chance of succeeding.

5. The probability that the figure has his feet in a Masonic posture (which the ritual says is the only way a Candidate will be admitted to Freemasonry) by chance is 0.5 because he can have them that way or not. No other figure in Rosslyn holds it's feet in this strange symbolic way so again the Null Hypothesis is being given the full benefit of any doubt.
6. The probability that the ceremony is taking place between two pillars by chance is 0.5 because the alternative would be not to place the two pillars there.
7. The probability that a Templar is holding the noose by chance is 0.5 and this is generous towards the Null Hypothesis because the rope could be loose or held by somebody who is not a Templar. In the modern Masonic ceremony the rope is held in many lodges by the senior deacon whilst the candidate takes his oath hold the VSL.

To consider the possibility of all these seven probabilities occurring at the same time. To find the composite probability I must multiply the separate probabilities together. So the highest possible probability of the null hypothesis being true is $0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.5$ which works out as $=0.0078$.

So there are only eight chances in a thousand that all these elements linking Freemasonry to Templarism and Sir William St Clair are there by co-incident. There is only one chance in 128 of the links being co-incident. On this evidence Robert Lomas rejects the null hypothesis that leaves him with a strong claim that Sir William was linked to Freemasonry in 1440 and that this link involved Templars.

So to sum up, if each point of similarity is given a 50% chance of being there by accident. (Which is giving the opposite view the best odds possible) There are only 8 chances in 1000 that it is pure chance.

Who Built Rosslyn Chapel?

Rosslyn Chapel was built by Sir William St Clair Last St Clair Jarl (Prince) of Orkney (fig. 4). He was a direct descent of William de St Clair Last Temple Grand Master of Scotland, who died taking the heart of the dead king, Robert de Bruce on a last crusade to Jerusalem.



Fig. 4

The Tombstone of the Templar Sir William St Clair, preserved in Rosslyn Chapel

Sir William, the chapel builder, is also the direct ancestor of First Grand Master Mason of Scotland, also named William St Clair (Sinclair)

Why did William Build Rosslyn Chapel?

Robert Lomas believed to house artifacts brought by the Knights Templar to Scotland in 1126. Between 1118 and 1128 the Templars excavated the ruins of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. Hugue de Payen, first Grand Master of the Knights Templar, served on the First Crusade with Henri St Clair, First Earl of Roslin and Hugue visited Roslin in 1126 where he was given land to build the first Templar Preceptory outside the Holy Land, which is now the village of Temple near to the village of Roslin and Rosslyn Chapel.

How do we know about the Templar Excavations?

In 1860 the British Army Engineers mounted an expedition to Jerusalem and two Lieutenants, Wilson and Warren, they mapped out the city to Ordnance Survey standards. They excavated beneath Temple Mount and found many deep tunnels in which they also found and recorded Templar artifacts.

(See The Second Messiah, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, Arrow, London, 1998 for full details)

Here is an illustration (Fig. 5) of the shaft and tunnels dug by the Templars beneath Temple Mount, taken from the Army report of 1870

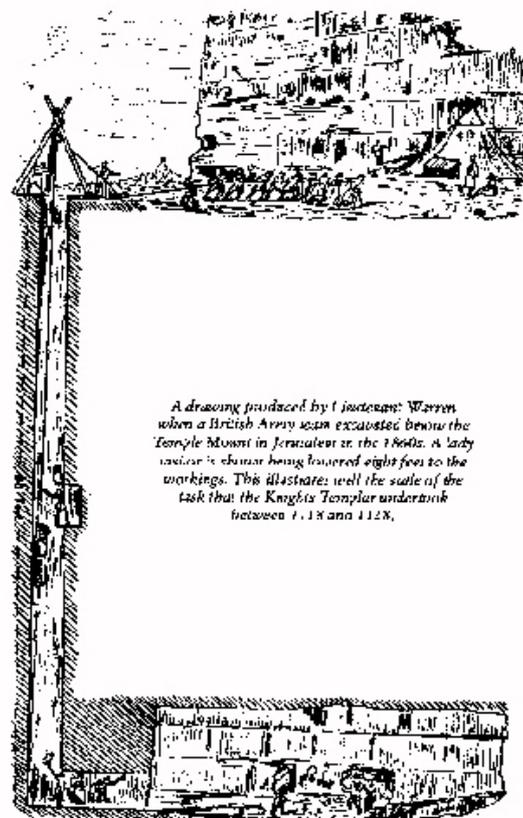


Fig. 5.

Draws of the tunnels found by the British Army Expedition which excavated below Temple Mount in Jerusalem show the tunnels left by Templars The shaft is 80 feet deep.

Why Build a Copy of Herod's Temple?

In 1440 William St Clair was the most powerful man in Scotland. He decided to build Rosslyn Chapel to house the treasures he had inherited from the Templars and establish a seat of spiritual authority to rival James II who was dabbling in English politics and finally got himself killed during the War of the Roses.

William brought in Masons to build Rosslyn Chapel and built the town of Roslin to house them.

When James II died (1460) his son, James III, thought William was posing to great a threat to the Crown of Scotland so he stripped William of Orkney (including title of Prince) and broke up many of his estates.

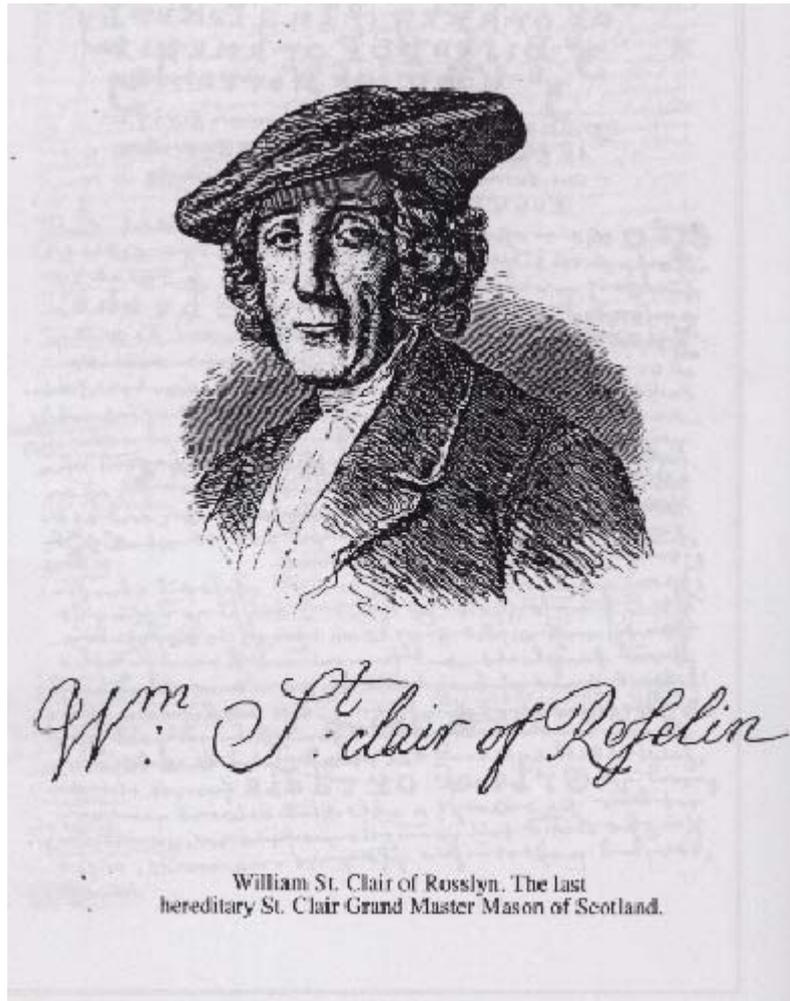
So now we have visited briefly some of the key events involved in the creation of Freemasonry. There is much more to the story, for example the St Clairs had lands at Kilwinning and were involved with famous Mother Kilwinning Lodge there, but there is not enough time today to tell the full story. So let me finish with a Timeline of the Key events which led to the Formations of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813 (1717) and the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736.

The Timeline of Freemasonry

- 1440 Masons were given the Mason's word by William to preserve the secrets of the Templars he was building Rosslyn Chapel to house.
- 1483 The burgh of Aberdeen is recorded as being involved in settlement of a dispute between six 'masownys of the lurge'. Masonry is starting to spread out as lodges initiate Candidates and give them the 'Mason's Word'
- 1599 Earliest surviving Lodge Minutes from Edinburgh
- 1601 James VI made a Mason at Lodge of Scoon and Perth.
- 1602 William Schaw sets up the modern lodge system in Scotland following the instructions of James VI
- 1602 The Lodges of Scotland affirm William St Clair of Roslin as hereditary Grand Master Mason of Scotland from TI
- 1603 James VI takes Freemasonry to England when he becomes James I of Britain
- 1641 Sir Robert Moray becomes the first Mason recorded to be made on English Soil.
- 1715 First Jacobite Rising, lodges begin to disclaim their Scottish roots
- 1717 Formation of Grand Lodge of England denies Jacobite Heritage. **Not yet the UGLE** (1751 a 2nd rival Grand Lodge of England came about, and the union of these two English Grand Lodges was not agreed until 1813 when it became the United Grand Lodge of England)
- 1725 First National Grand Lodge formed in Ireland

- 1736 Grand Lodge of Scotland Formed as a counter measure to London expansionism.
- 1736 William St Clair of Roslin made First Grand Master Mason of Scotland and signs away his hereditary rights in favour of elected officers.

Let me leave you with a portrait of William Sinclair of Roslin, First Grand Master Mason of Scotland 1736



Incidentally, William had to be made a Mason before he could take over as grand master mason.

Rosslyn Chapel

Stretching 21 metres (69 feet) in length and standing nearly 13 metres (42 feet) high, practically every surface of Rosslyn Chapel is carved in an outstanding display of craftsmanship. There are literally hundreds of individual figures and scenes carved around you.



Maize

Surrounding a window are carvings of maize or Indian Corn. The presence of this plant carving in the Chapel raises many questions: not only is it an exotic plant but it originates from North America, a country traditionally thought to have been discovered by Columbus in 1492, almost 50 years after Rosslyn Chapel was built.

Lucifer

One of the many Masonic carvings in the Chapel Hanging upside down and bound with rope, this is the fallen angel Lucifer. It is one of the depictions of angels in unusual positions in the Chapel, which are significant in the rites of Freemasonry.



The Star of Bethlehem and the Nativity

Representation of the birth of Christ

This hanging boss encompasses the eight-pointed Star of Bethlehem carved with figures of the nativity. Clockwise around its sides are the Virgin and child; the manger; the three wise men; and three shepherds.

Green man

One of the best examples of over 100 'Green Man' carvings in the Chapel
Rosslyn is renowned for its many carvings of the Green Man, historically a pagan figure. The vines sprouting from his mouth represent nature's growth and fertility, illustrating the unity between humankind and nature.



Angel playing the bagpipes

One of the many carvings of angels playing musical instruments
The carved angels in the Lady Chapel are celebrating Christ's birth with music. Bagpipes first appeared in Scotland from the mid-1400s and this is thought to be one of the earliest depictions of the instrument.

Trip to Rosslyn Chapel in June 2010

Musical cubes

Carved cubes that protrude from the arches of the Lady Chapel

Each one of these cubes is unique, carved with individual symbols made up of lines and dots. Various theories suggest that these may represent keys to a secret code or be musical notes. The Rosslyn Motet has recently been composed as one 'solution' to the code.



The Dance of Death

A string of figures caught in the 'Dance of Death'

Characters from all walks of life are each accompanied by a skeleton, Death. The dance springs from the skeletons pushing and pulling the reluctant people off to meet their fate and symbolises death's inevitable triumph over life.

Apprentice Pillar

The most elaborately decorated pillar in the Chapel
This pillar contains one of the most famous and fascinating riddles of the building. An apprentice mason is said to have carved the pillar, inspired by a dream, in his master's absence. On seeing the magnificent achievement on his return, the master mason flew into a jealous rage and struck the apprentice, killing him outright.



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