

## IS TODAY'S FREEMASONRY LINKED TO THE ORIGINAL KNIGHTS TEMPLAR?

The following is extracted from an article by Bro Tony Higgins, *Hon Grand Sword Bearer of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, Past Substitute District Grand Master of the Far East (SC)*. The article was written in the early 1990s after Bro Tony had read 'The Second Messiah', a book written by Christopher Knight.

'The authors trace Freemasonry, as we know it today, back to the original Knights Templar. In 1118 AD these knights spent nine years excavating the ruins of Herod's Temple and in tunnels beneath, discovered a number of artefacts and historic scrolls which detailed the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, subsequent historical happenings and the parting of the ways of Christianity and Judaism. [In the 1860s a British Army team re-entered the same tunnels and dated several Knight Templar items they had left behind]. The scrolls were moved in great secrecy to Europe by the Grand Master, Hugues de Payens. Quite illegally, one scroll was copied and can now be seen in the library of Ghent University. In 1127, the Grand Master, passed on these scrolls for safe-keeping to his kinsman and brother Knight Templar, Baron Henri St. Clair who resided in Scotland. In 1307, the King of France, through the Pope, declared all Knights Templars to be heretics and in France alone 15,000 were arrested including the Grand Master, Jacques de Molay. He was cruelly tortured and eventually burned to death. Here, another interesting point is made. The authors offer convincing evidence that the Turin Shroud was used to cover the body of Molay, not Christ, hence the title of the book - The Second Messiah. This is possible as it is now an accepted scientific fact that the Shroud dates no earlier than 1260. The survivors of the purge either went to ground or fled to Scotland to join Robert the Bruce, who had already been excommunicated, taking their rituals with them. The Templars repaid their hosts by taking part in the battle of Bannockburn and helped to win the day for Robert in 1314.

The question now arises: how did the Knights Templar become Masons?

The answer being that the Order was divided into ranks: Knights, Priest and Serving Brothers. The latter were further divided into two groups, the Men at Arms and the Craftsmen (Masons). It was this latter group that built castles and cathedrals across Europe and the Near East. Formed into Lodges they used the Templar icons, the shroud, emblems of mortality, the cable tow, etc. in their various ceremonies. In 1440, the St. Clair family, keepers of the scrolls, commenced construction of the now famous Roslin Chapel. This is identical in size and constructed to the same specification as Herod's Temple. Even the two Pillars, 'B' and 'J', are in the same positions. As many of us know who have studied this building, there are numerous carvings with Masonic connections. What is particularly interesting are the carvings of animals and flora and fauna totally unique to North America but carved long before Columbus set sail.

During their stay in Roslin, the authors were entertained by the St. Clair family at their home in Fife. They also consulted a number of people connected with the Chapel including Stuart Beattie. Their presence added to local history when they engaged an independent scholar of Gaelic to research the meaning of the word

Rosslyn (Roslin). The answer they received was quite amazing - '*Ancient knowledge passed down the generations*'.

Lodges using the Templar ritual sprang up in a number of locations in Scotland and minutes of a meeting held in 1598 still exist. In 1601, James VI of Scotland was Initiated into the *Perth & Scoon Lodge*. When he succeeded Elizabeth I, as King James I of England, he took the Scottish Ritual south with him and so Freemasonry came to England. In 1717 London Lodges discarded much of the Scottish Ritual as being 'too Jacobitish'.

Finally, on a lighter note, the authors also inform us that cards, similar to tarot cards, when presented in certain sequences told the story of the Knights Templar, their history and rituals. After the Templars were branded heretics the said cards were reduced from 78 to 52 incorporating the following changes: face cards King, Queen and Prince (Jack) were all retained. The Knight (Templar) was discarded, whilst the Fool (Joker) was used in a different role. Even the suits were changed. Hearts replaced Cups, Clubs replaced Wands, Diamonds replaced Pentacles and Spades replaced Swords'.

V E Kt Frank Johnston, Great Registrar.