

What are the links between the First Templars and Freemasonry?

Judging by the number of books on this subject it is an obviously intriguing subject.

Indeed it seems that there are not only a sizeable number of authors who think that the answer is 'Yes, there is' but who also believe that there is a public out there who want to know whether that is the case.

When you consider the romantic ideas linked with the Knights Templar since the appearance of the popular Sir Walter Scott novel 'Ivanhoe', the view that the two Orders might be linked has had much to commend it to popular taste.

The possibility that a noble and much misunderstood society of warrior monks should have lived on in secret after their apparent dissolution in and after 1307 is, some think, surely a very likely basis for the emergence of this other 'secret' organisation to which we belong.

That thesis has all the characteristics of modern 'whodunits', ample motive, hidden perpetrators, clues that only very careful investigation can unravel and a denouement when only enough evidence can point to a final solution.

Proving the connection between the knights of old and today's 'murky Masonic brethren' (yes, you lot) is a sure recipe for a momentary 'best seller'. But what are the facts in this matter?

Certainly some of the Freemasons of the 18th Century began to consider a possible new development. It was that there could be a quite natural transition from the 'builder warriors' who, following their return from exile in Babylon, were armed with trowel and sword in order to erect a new temple in Jerusalem to replace the old.

Having been mentioned in the traditional history that was preserved in the Old Charges of the stonemasons' guilds their very purpose and presence in the Holy Land led naturally to the idea of Masonic Knighthood, using the honoured titles of Templar and Hospitaller.

By the 1750s there were certainly indications in Ireland that Red Cross and other Knightly grades were being created.

By the 1770s in England we have the earliest evidence of a Masonic Order that bears the name of Knight Templar. It would thus appear that on the face of it there were those who saw some kind of connection between the two bodies. What matters is just what the nature of that connection might be.

That there was any direct, or even residual, link of a personal or organisational kind with the original Templars over a period of 450 years is, I'm sorry to say, highly unlikely, and as far as I am aware, without a shred of serious evidence to prove it – unless any of you have proof otherwise of course!

Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that the Roman Catholic Church authorities have always been insistent that there is not, and never has been, any historical connection between their still existent Knights of Malta and any Masonic Order.

Those, then, who claim that there are such links have much to prove!

What, of course, is claimed by some is that whilst there may not be any direct link to actual Templar or Malta Knights there is a clear similarity of ideas and symbol.

If that is what is being claimed then the question that still has to be answered is, by whom and how did this transference of features take place? Was it merely coincidence or who was it that was involved?

Granted that there is such a resemblance of features it is at this point that there may appear to be a possible solution though no one to my knowledge has yet investigated this suggestion fully.

Could it be that any link between those knightly orders and Accepted Freemasonry was not one created by the knights but by traditions handed on by the stonemasons they employed?

One important fact can be easily overlooked. Because the Cistercian monks, and hence the Templars who were an offshoot of them, purposely built their properties in the most remote places at the time, they were permitted to maintain their own stonemasons as lay brothers in house. For the monks to have had to rely on passing or travelling masons would have been too hazardous. Templar masons were part of the whole outfit.

The next question then is, to whom did the masons and any descendants turn for employment after 1307 when the Templars were disbanded?

Many would have been taken in by the Cistercians or Hospitallers and there they could serve until those houses were dissolved in 1536/37. At that point some of those monastic stonemasons could become guild masons in the nearby cities of England.

If all this is so then we have a viable connection that can be understood and even studied.

What that now needs is someone who can apply himself to the task.....