

The Rosslyn Chapel, the St Clair's of Roslin and the Templar Order: The Connection.

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Near Edinburgh, Scotland, there is a building that for years has been shrouded in mystery. Sir William St Clair, the third and last St Clair Prince of Orkney, founded the Rosslyn Chapel, or the Collegiate Chapel of St Mathew, as it was to have been known, in 1446. It is in fact only part of the choir of what was intended to be a larger cruciform building with a tower at its centre.

Sir William was, in 1441, appointed by King James II as the Patron and Protector of the Freemasons of Scotland, and the office was made hereditary in his family. He was considered in some circles to be one of the best and greatest Masons of the age.

After Sir William died in 1484, he was buried in the unfinished chapel and the larger building he had planned was never completed. But the foundations of the nave are said to have been excavated in the nineteenth century and found to extend ninety-one feet beyond the Chapel's original west door, under the existing baptistery and churchyard.

It was the last resting place chosen by the Templar Order for their treasure and is said to be the centre of peace, as well as a shrine for the scrolls found in Jerusalem during their excavations at the Temple Mount. For years, archaeologists and historians have tried to recover the artefacts that were found on the Holy Land. Ultimately, the discovery of these findings would shed light on thousands of years of knowledge about the St Clair family and their relationship with the Templar Order. Rosslyn Chapel stands as a memorial to the Knights Templar, hiding a library of secrets about the St. Clair's of Roslin and sculpted in stone symbolism.

The Templar Order was on a quest for holy artefacts, and William St. Clair of Roslin's shield carried an engrailed black cross on silver, clearly denoting him as a Grail Knight. This was one of the twists in the mystery of Rosslyn Chapel and the connection with the Templars.

Jewish families had fled Israel to Europe, forming new alliances and holding power and lands in France, therefore instrumenting the formation of the Knights Templar. The Templar Order functioned as protectors of the pilgrims, however in reality they had an entirely different agenda to follow - the recovery of whatever constituted the true treasure of the Temple of Jerusalem (*Swanson, 2006*).

Hugh de Payne, Andre de Montbard, and seven other knights founded the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem in 1118. Hugh de Payne was married to Catherine de St. Clair of Roslin and Andre de Montbard, a relative of the Duke of Burgundy, was also the uncle of Bernard de Fontaines, the most powerful man in Europe in the early twelfth century (*Baigent, 1982*).

Initially, the Templars were established to protect the Holy Land; however they became concerned about their role in the church, and why it was believed that they should never bare blood on their shields when their lives had been dedicated to protecting the word of God.

The formation of the Templar Order and their developing appeal was starting to attract free thinkers, one of those being Bernard de Fontaines. Bernard was a leading thinker in the Cistercian Order when he mysteriously became involved with the Knights Templar. For reasons that haven't been explained, bizarre events started to occur within the noble family. Although his family was shocked at his vocation, they decided to follow him when he joined in 1112. This influx of members more than doubled the size of the Templar Order.

Shortly after Bernard joined, when he was only twenty-four years of age, he was suddenly appointed to the position of Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Clairvaux. In his position, he transcribed a discourse,

which he addressed to Hugh de Payne. The last paragraph reads **“Hail, land of promise, which, formerly flowing only with milk and honey for they possessors, now stretchest forth the food of life, and the means of salvation to the entire world”** (Swanson, 2006). The possible translation to this cryptic message could be construed as what was once abundant and plentiful for all, is now only reserved for, or controlled by, a single entity. Could this have been a reference to the growing power of the Templar Order?

It was discovered that certain documentation that the Templars had found while excavating under the Temple Mount, had alluded to the fact that the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ never happened. It was also said that they had found the Ark of the Covenant during their excavations, and many people believe that the Templars hid the Ark under Rosslyn Chapel. If that was found to be true, it would be one of the greatest discoveries in the world proving once and for all that the Ten Commandments really did exist, challenging Christians to rethink their ideals about the nature of the resurrection, and whether the body of Jesus Christ was removed from his resting place.

The discoveries of these sacred artefacts and the damaging repercussions they could have had for the Templars could explain why the Templars became multinational conglomerates, richer than any kingdom in Europe. Noble families had donated land showing their commitment to the Order, while Templar buildings were constructed on major trade routes. Their activities directly resulted in the boom of European economics, strengthening the merchant class, which led to the development of capitalism. The Templars created a climate of peace at their trade ports, allowing pilgrims to journey all over Europe, in exchange acting as their personal bankers. Their power grew as a direct result of sacred rituals and an extraordinary mix of military skills.

During the crusades and suppression of the Templars, the Order had to disappear from sight. Some say they fled to Lombardy, Scotland, Portugal and the Baltic states. Many fleeing knights found asylum in lodges of the Craft masons.

Knights in Scotland went through an entirely different experience. The knights who reached Scotland fought alongside Robert the Bruce and gained royal protection. Sir Henry St Clair of Roslin and his sons, William and Henry, took part in the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, which ultimately routed the English and made Robert the Bruce the first true King of Scotland (Albany, 1988). Even today, the legacy of Bruce lives on in Rosslyn Chapel, which depicts stone angels holding the heart of Robert the Bruce.

Earl William St Clair of Roslin attempted to celebrate the beliefs of the Templar Knights with the erection of Rosslyn Chapel. He created a fireproof library that housed secret coded Templar artefacts and documentation. The chapel is the embodiment of sacred and theosophical acknowledgements, representing a three dimensional structure for late medieval teachings. Every year thousands of visitors make pilgrimages to Rosslyn Chapel with their guidebook closely at their side – a copy of Dan Brown’s “Da Vinci Code”.

Bill Putnam, the Principal Lecturer in Archaeology at Bournemouth University until his retirement, released, along with John Edwin Wood, a magazine article in “History Today” which peeled away the evidence to find an extraordinary hoax at the heart of Dan Brown’s best-selling novel (Wood, 2009). Of course, this hasn’t halted the curiosities of many conspiracy theorists and tourists who travel to Rosslyn with visions of the Holy Grail, the head of Jesus Christ, and quite possibly the Ark of the Covenant, which they believe, resides in a chamber below the chapel.

Others may visit because they believe it’s a portal for the supernatural. Of course, this isn’t exactly as bizarre as it seems considering Rosslyn is one of the seven druidic planetary oracles, which was part of an apocalyptic configuration in stone.

So what exactly does this mean? The symbolism of the ornate carvings can be interpreted in many different ways, and although many have been deciphered, most of them are a mystery of mixed and conflicting ideologies. Take for instance the presence of the Green Men, which are found all over the chapel. The significance behind the many different carvings of the Green Men is unknown, although William Anderson believes even if one were to regard him as the lowest level, as a mascot of the

Masons, his presence in so many regions and over long a period of time indicates that he had a particular meaning to them (*Hopkins, 2000*). In some legends they speak about a green knight, although the symbolism and the identity of the knight is unknown.

The Apprentice Pillar in Rosslyn Chapel has such an innate quality about it, that it surpasses all the other carvings in the chapel. Hitler had an immense interest in the pillar making the assessment that the Holy Grail was hidden inside. Archaeologists have been able to scan the pillar and have come to the conclusion that a metal object is inside the pillar. Although it would be an amazing opportunity to examine the pillar to its full extent, the curator at Rosslyn will not allow any further investigations or deep scans to verify what is actually inside. The pillar is said to represent a transformation of the ancient pagan conception, although what most people associate with the pillar is the story of the apprentice who actually built it.

The pillar was intended to be the crowning achievement of the master stonemason; however while the master stonemason was away, his apprentice took the plans and created the pillar himself, far surpassing the skill and beauty defined by the original plans as conceived by the master himself. When the master returned, he beheld the exquisite beauty and surpassing skill with which the pillar had been made and in a fit of rage he killed the apprentice with a sharp blow to the crown of his head (*Green, 2001*).

The Egyptians built the pyramids pointing towards the stars in a particular configuration. The nested walls of the Forbidden City were created to surround the world, which the emperor believed revolved around him. Then we have Rosslyn Chapel, a symbol of Templar beliefs constructed in an apocalyptic formation much like Stonehenge or Bluehenge. So what is the meaning behind all of this?

A simple explanation would be that the architects knew or could foresee the future. In the case of Rosslyn, Earl St Clair was believed to hold the key to life's unanswered questions. Was this because Rosslyn holds all of the artefacts found at the Temple Mount, which ultimately would provide archaeologists and historians thousands of years of knowledge? If the key to life is under the chapel at Rosslyn, we might not ever find the answer.

In addition to the theory that Freemasons and Knights Templar used the Chapel, is the claim that those groups, stationed at Rosslyn Chapel, journeyed to North America and back before Columbus. This claim is based on several points:

1. Some of what appear to be the oldest graveyards in Nova Scotia (which means New Scotland) have Masonic symbols and Crusader crosses on them.
2. The Westford Knight is a rock engraving in Massachusetts supposedly showing a Scottish knight, linked to the Henry Sinclair party, with the Clan Gunn markings.
3. Most importantly, Rosslyn Chapel, although completed six years before Columbus's voyage, have stone carvings in it allegedly of plants unique to the Western hemisphere – ears of corn.

There are several other legends associated with Rosslyn Chapel's links with the Knights Templars and the Masons. Sealed burial vaults below the chapel are thought to contain the remains of ten Barons of Rosslyn in their full armour. Sealed chambers under the basement of the chapel, however, have yet to be excavated for fear of collapse of the entire structure. These chambers are filled with pure white Arabic sand – rumoured to have been brought to the chapel by the Knights Templar from the Dome of the Rock – and ultrasonic scans have indeed revealed the presence of six leaden vaults within the sand.

But some believe these vaults, or other parts of the chapel, may also contain the Holy Grail or the Ark of the Covenant or even part of the actual cross on which Christ was crucified. Furthermore the Masonic links are held by some to explain why Cromwell's troops spared the chapel in 1650.

Some of these theories are intriguing and some are attractive, while others veer towards the fanciful. One thing is certain - they certainly add to the atmosphere of a visit to Rosslyn Chapel.