

The Rosslyn Hoax?

By Robert L.D.Cooper

Robert L. D. Cooper is the Curator of the Grand Lodge of Scotland Museum and Library (Edinburgh) and is custodian of the oldest and most precious Masonic documents anywhere in the world. He is in the most privileged position to know 'from the inside' the truth about all the various theories regarding Rosslyn Chapel, Freemasonry, the Knights Templar and the St. Clair family. For the first time a Scottish Freemason, one pre-eminent in the field, speaks out. At last, he says, "Scottish Freemasons themselves are being asked about Freemasonry, Rosslyn Chapel, the Knights Templar etc." This book will provide many of the answers readers of, for example, *The Temple and The Lodge*; *'The Hiram Key'*; and *'The Da Vinci Code'* etc, have been seeking. *The following has been extracted from the Newsletters of the Pietre-Stones Review Of Freemasonry, to which we are indebted for the information.*

In the last twenty five years or so there has been a huge amount of material published in the public domain about Rosslyn Chapel; Freemasonry, the Knights Templar and the St. Clair family and a whole host of subsidiary subjects. Beginning with *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln in 1982 Rosslyn Chapel made its debut on the international stage but it was not until the publication of *The Temple and The Lodge* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh in 1989 that it began to assume a central position within the lore of modern Freemasonry and became part of all the various writings on the previously mentioned subjects. From that very brief cursory mention in 1982, the chapel slowly attracted interest, interest which accelerated, magnifying its position within the lore of Freemasonry and eventually taking it into the realms of a Hollywood block buster movie just released in the cinema world. It has come a very long way indeed in just 25 years - or has it?

Rosslyn has been thought of as a curiosity for a very long time. Visitors since the 17th century have commented on the unusual architecture, obscure carvings and the stories surrounding the and it For hundreds of years artist have drawn and painted it, authors have written about it and with the invention of photography it has been visually captured on film The air of mystery that is part of the fascination of the place has been there almost from the start. How and when does Freemasonry, the Knights Templar; the Holy Grail etc. come to be associated with the chapel? What did the Freemasons of Scotland think about it and how did they interpret the place? Did they visit the chapel and, if so, what did they think about it? What did they do there?

After I became a Freemason I was introduced to an entirely different version of Scottish history to that which I had been taught at school, college and university This was fascinating. How could so many teachers, professors and others in the educational system have got it so badly wrong? I was delighted! I had a completely new field of history to investigate and it was all on my own doorstep! The Freemasons of Scotland apparently had a secret, esoteric, history which was completely different and unknown to anyone who was not a Freemason. It was not until I was appointed to the position of Curator of the Grand Lodge of Scotland Museum and Library that I began to take a real interest in what was being written about my country's history and how that impacted on what I knew about Freemasonry in Scotland. However, a new position meant acquiring new skills and learning all the 'in's and out's' of Freemasons' Hall, how Grand Lodge operated and so on. That meant that my personal research was again delayed. However, I did begin to notice certain things that were locked away in my memory for future use.

I became aware that authors, TV programme makers and even painters were using Freemasonry to make connections with Rosslyn Chapel and that in itself was very interesting. What did begin to disturb me was the fact that authors, in particular, were writing about 'Masonic' documents such as the Schaw Statutes (1598 and 1599); the earliest Lodge records in the world (1599); the so called St. Clair'Charters' (1601 and 1628) and the Falkland Statutes (1638) yet not one of the authors writing about these very documents had come to Freemasons' Hall. Well, why should they you might ask? Because all these documents are the property of the Grand Lodge of Scotland!

Although that was, to say the least, disappointing there was an impact on my duties as Curator. As more and more writers produced books about the documents they never came to see I began to receive enquiries from all over the world asking questions and seeking confirmation not only about these precious early Masonic documents but also about more peripheral subjects such as Rosslyn Chapel and the St. Clair family. In an

attempt to satisfy the demand for information I procured, prepared and edited on behalf of the Grand Lodge of Scotland the first known guide book of Rosslyn Chapel: *An Account of the Chapel of Roslin 1778*. This was published in 2000 and has now gone to a second reprint. In 2002, at the request of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, I purchased, prepared and edited the very rare work: *The Genealogie of the Sainteclairs of Rosslyn* based on the manuscripts of Father Richard Augustine Hay and published in a printed form in 1835 by James Maidment, Librarian of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh. The Grand Lodge's reprint of this book is especially significant because, for the first time, it provided translations of the numerous Latin documents included in Maidment's work. I pay tribute here to the translator, Brother John Wade, for his scholarly and patient assistance.

These two works, I had hoped, would help stem the flow of enquiries about Rosslyn Chapel etc. but alas it was not to be and I found myself repeating the same answers over and over again. Many of these questions related to Rosslyn Chapel and so in 2003 I prepared and edited a new, revised, edition of the official Rosslyn Chapel guidebook: *The Illustrated Guide to Rosslyn Chapel etc.* which had been sold at the chapel since 1892. Thankfully that did slow the number of enquiries being received but then, within a couple of months of its publication, the first edition of the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown appeared in the bookshops. The enquiries started to flood in again - I was back to square one! As sales of the novel soared into the millions and then the tens of millions so did the number of enquires to me multiply. Sadly, I am now custodian not only of the oldest Masonic documents in the world but also of hundreds if not thousands of unanswered letters, e-mails and voicemail messages. I apologise to all who have written but who not received a response.

There was one last gamble to produce a reasonably comprehensive account, based on all the research over the preceding years, in the hope that it would serve to answer most of the questions being asked. Such a book would also provide the text of all the important documents discussed but never examined by those popular authors who wrote about them.

The title: *The Rosslyn Hoax?*, is an indication that my research over all these years has resulted in some very interesting facts brought to light for the first time. Has the public been the victim of a massive hoax? That is for you to decide.

(The Rosslyn Hoax? web site is at: www.rosslynhoax.corn)