

## Freemasonry and Baron Karl Gottlieb von Hund

=====

The history of Freemasonry since the early 1600's has been enriched by the endless succession of colourful and, at times, controversial characters. Some were fine upstanding members of the craft, whilst the contribution of others might be best described as dubious. One example is that of Baron Karl Gottlieb von Hund (1722-1776), who was such a controversial figure that, even today, opinions are still divided over whether or not he was sincere, or at best gullible, or at worst a complete charlatan.

Baron von Hund was initiated into Freemasonry in the Lodge of the Three Thistles at Frankfurt in 1742. He was an enthusiastic Freemason and as a businessman was able to travel widely in masonic circles. In 1751 Baron von Hund began to promote a variant of Freemasonry, which he called the "Rite of Strict Observance" (its name derived from the oath that required loyalty to the mysterious "unknown superiors").

Respected masonic historian R.F. Gould stated that "...this Rite was based on a fiction that at the time of the suppression of the Templars, and the execution of their last (historical) Grand Master, his alleged successor, Pierre D'Aumont, with seven other knights, took refuge in Scotland, and there preserved the occult wisdom and the due succession of the Order".

Baron von Hund claimed that in 1743 whilst in Paris he was initiated into this "Templar Freemasonry" at a ceremony presided over by one of the "unknown superiors" known as the Knight of the Red Feather, and in the presence of the Earl of Kilmarnock and Lord Clifford, who were both supporters of their exiled Stuart King bonnie prince Charles. Von Hund even intimated that the "unknown superior" at his initiation was indeed Prince Charles Edward Stuart.

However von Hund could never provide further evidence or proof to back his claims, and could only state that the 'unknown superiors' had failed to keep their promise and contact him again with further information. He maintained to his death in 1776 that he was speaking the truth.

Irrespective of the veracity of Baron von Hund's statements, the Strict Observance had a great influence upon European Freemasonry and as R.F. Gould states, "...during the next twenty years (i.e. mid 1760's onwards) it pervaded all continental Europe to almost the exclusion of every other system; within the next ten it had practically ceased to exist..."



Some masonic researchers have suggested that although the legend of the order was fictional, Baron von Hund may have indeed been initiated into a new "Templar" based variant of Freemasonry by exiled Scottish Stuart supporters, who would not have been able to make contact with him again due to the failed 1745 Jacobites/Scottish uprising in support of bonnie Prince Charles – most either were killed in battle, executed, imprisoned or banished. So perhaps Baron von Hund was telling the truth; and then again maybe he wasn't.