



**The St. Clairs of Rosslyn
and The Craft**

Common claims and comment

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From Normandy, the St. Clairs followed William the Conqueror and settled at Roslin. They named Rosslyn Chapel after the “Rose Line” as they were descended directly from Christ.

The St. Clairs were first recorded as living in Sur-Elle in Normandy, taking their name from a village in the area. In 1280 they were gifted the Barony of Roskelyn previous tenanted by the de Roskelyn family from whom the name Rosslyn derives. Charters liSt. Thomas de Roslyn, Thomas de Roselyn and Henry de Roskelyn living at Roslin before the St. Clairs arrived in the area.

1096 The first Scottish born St. Clair was a Knight Templar and went on the first Crusade.

The first St. Clair son born in Scotland was Henri de St. Clair and he took part in the first Crusade, but this predated the formation of the Templar Order. He was a Crusader not a Templar.

Hughes de Payen, a founder of the Knights Templars visited Scotland and married Catherine St. Clair in 1120. This was the Start of the line of St. Clair, Knight Templars.

No extant record of either this visit (to Scotland) or of any such marriage exists. In 1113 Hughes de Payen is recorded as being married to Elizabeth de Chappes and they remained married until her death in 1170. The first reliable documented St. Clair membership of the order is with the newly reformed Templars, which were founded after the establishment of the Grand lodge of Scotland.

1307-12 Demise of the Templars at the hands of Philip the fair of France and Pope Clement 5th. Templars escaped with a great treasure and sailed to Scotland where they coalesced into the Freemasons and later built Rosslyn Chapel to house a great treasure.

Two Templars were tried in Scotland and two of the St. Clairs of Rosslyn, Henry, and William, testified against them. Templars had resided in Scotland for almost 200 years before their demise. Their wealth lay in land and commerce, but they were on the wane and there is no reliable evidence to support this claim.

Similarly, the view that freemasonry is more likely to have developed from operative masonry while taking its structure, values, and principals from the church, as did the Templars, is better supported by the evidence available.

Rosslyn Chapel has been excavated and no treasure was found. The record of the excavation is held in the 1846 papers of the Royal Institute of British Architects in London.

In 1314 a St. Clair led the charge of Knight Templars which saved the day at Bannockburn.

The only former Knight Templar recorded on the field of battle fought on the English side. He was apparently unhorsed and drowned in the bog by the Scots who stood on his back to hold him down until he drowned.

In 1330 a St. Clair was killed by the moors while he and a group of Scots were taking Bruce's heart to Jerusalem. Douglas returned with the heart of Bruce and St. Clairs mortal remains.

Yes, a St. Clair is recorded as part of the group but the story was later embellished to include them throwing the heart at the Moors before charging, saying that where Bruce led they would follow.

1379 Henry the Holy became the first Prince of Orkney and then as Henry the Navigator, sailed with the Veno brothers and discovered America in the 1380's or 1390's.

The St. Clairs held the Earldom of Orkney for three generations. Orkney was an Earldom not a Principality. However, they also managed to retain significant lands in the Orkneys by reclaiming the lands of tenants who defaulted on the increased rents charged, while keeping these reclaimed grounds in a separate holding from the original estate. In 1470 the now reduced "original estate" was then transferred to the King, in exchange for other estates in Fife.

Henry the Holy was not known as such in his lifetime - the title was first attributed in 1898 by Roland Sinclair in New Zealand. Similarly, the title - Henry the navigator only dates from the 20th century. He never sailed on the Veno voyage. Henry St. Clair is recorded as "fighting in the borders" – where he is recorded as a borders reaver at the time the voyage was meant to have taken place.

In 1558 the Veno map was published in Venice with a claim that two members of the Veno family, Nicolo and Antonio and someone named Zichmni, had sailed to Greenland in the 1380's.

Then in 1780 a travel writer suggested that St. Clair was this Zichmni, which he simply explained as a miss-recording of St. Clair.

In 1893 a Thomas Sinclair, in Chicago, claimed that St. Clair had travelled with the Veno brothers to America rather than Greenland, the stated destination of the Veno claim.

Not only was the claim that St. Clair was Zichmni roundly discredited but also the map and supporting letters were repeatedly shown to have been much later in origin and simply a hoax. The map was not only inaccurate but had been compiled

using place names taken from several older maps.

Similarly, the accounts of the voyage had been lifted, almost word for word from genuine accounts of other people's voyages.

Historians also traced records proving that the Veno brothers were in Venice at the time, one recorded as being in a debtor's prison.

Not deterred, proponents of the alleged voyage simply changed the dates of the hoax voyage, not realising that the date of death of one of the brothers now made the new date impossible too.

It is also worth noting that while Father Hay and another biographer Van Bassan had written wonderful things about Henry St. Clair, even winning battles that predated his birth, an imaginary marriage to a princess and bestowing the title "Prince" rather than Earl on him, neither had even alluded to any such voyage ever having been made.

Henry St. Clair is also said to be recorded as being active, raiding in the Scottish borders at the times involved.

Today either unaware of, or simply ignoring the above, there remains a body of people who are determined to re-write the history of the discovery of America based on the alleged Veno voyage and the carvings at Rosslyn Chapel.

In 1440 the foundation stone of Rosslyn Chapel was laid. Rosslyn is a Templar building and a repository of great secrets and treasures.

Rosslyn was built as a Roman Catholic Collegiate Chapel, built to ease William's passage through purgatory. It was not a Templar property. St. Clair was not a Templar and there is no treasure buried there. The chapel was excavated, and the findings recorded. The report of the dig is still available today.

1446 Bishop Tulloch records that the St. Clairs are of Norse origin.

When the sovereignty of the Shetlands was in dispute and the claim of the St. Clairs to having Nordic roots would have been convenient for the Scottish Crown, the family claimed that they were indeed of Norse Origin but that the documents confirming this had been “lost at sea” while crossing the North Sea. Later more family “records” were said to be lost in a fire and again at a later date, still more family records were claimed to have been lost by Father Hay, a recurring theme in the history of the St. Clairs, as told by them.

The St. Clairs had great wealth and held the Scottish crown jewels.

In 1545 the Lords wrote to William St. Clair to “produce all jewels, vestments and ornaments of the Abbey and Palace of Holyrood,”

The jewels referred to were not the crown jewels of Scotland.

The old usage of this term, which is still used in Freemasonry today meant “anything valued by” and probably referred to religious vestments, other paraphernalia such as chalices and crucifixes and the small statues of saints which could be moved and varied according to the time of year.

The St. Clairs were at one time land rich, but their influence was slight, as evidenced by the historical documentation.

William the third Earl of Orkney was the founder of Rosslyn Chapel. On his death the estate was divided between three of his sons. William his first son, by his first wife, initially inherited only part of the estates in Fife but successfully challenged and increased his inheritance. However, he was to head the line of the Lord St. Clairs of Dysart.

Another son also called William, to the founder's second wife, inherited lands in Caithness.

The estate at Rosslyn was passed to Oliver St. Clair, the third son. This line, the St. Clairs of Rosslyn continued until the death of the last Rosslyn, another William St. Clair, in 1778.

The St. Clairs were a saintly, respectable family, pillars of the community.

In 1484 Williams first (of six sons) was known as William the Waster. His mental health and general behavior were the subject of some debate.

William the third Earl of Orkney had married three times. His first wife, a first cousin, he married twice, the second time with Papal dispensation as the first marriage involved a prohibited relationship and had led to him being excommunicated for some time.

In 1591 the Presbytery couldn't church, (call to account for his sins), one "William the Lewd" as he was in prison! He didn't attend church when summoned and he refused to do penance for his transgressions. He "Cared not to sit for every such offence but if given a quart of wine would consider it"

An early form of ASBO, an interdict "not to harm others" was also issued against him and he is recorded in history as "The fornicating, brawling Laird O'Roslin" He eventually took a mistress and went to live in Ireland.

In 1596, a young William St. Clair (later of May) shot Baillie John McMorran dead. The Baillie was trying to put an end to a riotous protest in the High School. The protest was over reductions made to the school holidays due to the Reformation.

When Baillie John McMorran was shot in the head from a classroom window there were thoughts of hanging the culprit but when he was identified as the young St. Clair, his “indiscretion” was overlooked.

Perhaps this was to save any embarrassment to another William St. Clair of Rosslyn (the Lord Chief Justice of Scotland).

In 1650 General Monk spared Rosslyn Chapel, recognizing its Templar and Masonic significance.

Rosslyn had been ruinous for over 50 years before Monk arrived. Monks troops destroyed Rosslyn Castle, the seat of the St. Clair family. They also vandalized the chapel and today their musket damage is still visible. Rosslyn Chapel is built of stone with a barrel-vaulted roof which would not burn and could not be easily demolished. Also, as the altars had been removed, it was no longer a working chapel and therefore of little interest to Monk who stabled his troops and horses there.

The St. Clair’s were heritable protectors and patrons of the masons.

In 1600-1 the St. Clair’s presented a “Charter”, in fact a letter, which claimed that they had heritable rights re the masons, but there was no other evidence or any independent record of any such related activity by the St. Clair’s.

When asked by the king, they were unable to produce any other evidence of any such activity and their claim never passes the seals. Their claim was not upheld.

In 1627-8 the St. Clair’s submitted a 2nd claim. They were now claiming these rights not only in respect of Masons, (as in their earlier claim), but also in respect of the Wrights and Hammermen.

They now claimed that their initial claim had been “approval by a former King.” In response the King wrote of their “Pretend and heritable charge o’ the masons” and demanded evidence which they again failed to present.

Had their claims been approved, it would have allowed them to impose fines and to arbitrate in trade disputes, generating a much-needed income for themselves.

1693 The sleeping lady of Rosslyn (ghost) sighted by the family

This ghost story of a white lady was originally associated with a nearby estate belonging to a neighboring family and seems to have been “reattributed” to Rosslyn in order to attract visitors. The tale of the ghost of the White Lady was then initially associated with Rosslyn Castle.

More recently it has been “moved again” to the Chapel, adding to the many treasure myths.

In 1700 Fr Augustine Hay wrote the genealogy of the St. Clairs. He recorded their titles as Princes, Knights of the Golden Fleece and for William, a Knight of the Cockle.

No order of the Cockle existed - an order of the Coquile St. James {associated with Santiago di Compostella} existed but was exclusively for Spanish Aristocrats.

The Knights of the Golden Fleece was founded by Philip “the good” Duke of Burgundy - in 1429 its archives show that St. Clair was not a member.

Father Augustine Hay conveniently “lost” all (of his) source material and his genealogy of the St. Clair’s does not match the Dysart House Genealogy chart (in the St. Clair archives).

He claimed battle honors for some family members before they were born but he never mentioned America or any sea voyage. Father Hay was related to the St. Clair's and seems to have written a fanciful history for them which if challenged could be defended by recalling that there had been documents to support it, but he had simply lost them. It was not uncommon for families to embellish their family histories at this time, to enhance their social standing.

On 8/5/1736 yet another William St. Clair, was initiated into Freemasonry. Six months later he became the first Scottish Grand Master Mason of the newly created Grand Lodge of Scotland.

Some 290 years after Rosslyn Chapel was founded this William St. Clair was a compromise candidate for the office of the first Scottish Grand Master Mason.

Two leading factions had their own first preferences but settled on St. Clair who in return gave up all claims to any hereditary rights over the operative masons

The St. Clairs of Rosslyn are descendants of the first Grand Master Mason.

Prior to William's death, the derelict estate of Rosslyn was passed (in 1735) to General James St. Clair of the Dysart lineage but in 1762, the last Rosslyn, Sir James died. He had no surviving male issue. Rosslyn then passed to a nephew James Patterson who changed his name to St. Clair.

In 1789 James Patterson (now St. Clair) also died without any surviving male issue and Rosslyn passed to James Erskine, a grandson of his aunt. James Erskine then changed his name with Royal consent, to St. Clair-Erskine and in 1805 became the second Earl of Rosslyn.

He inherited this title from his Uncle Alexander Wedderburn (Lord Chancellor) who had been created Baron Loughburgh in 1795. He went on to become a Grand Master Mason and then a Grand Preceptor of the newly formed Masonic Knights Templars.

The fourth Earl, Francis Robert St. Clair-Erskine was also a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

The present 7th Lord Peter St. Clair of Rosslyn is of the St. Clair-Erskine lineage, related to but not a direct descendant of either the founder of Rosslyn Chapel, or of the first Grand Master Mason of Scotland.