



BORN IN BLOOD

THE LOST SECRETS OF FREEMASONRY

By John J. Robinson

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The author purports to prove that Freemasonry is directly descended from the medieval monastic Knights Templar, and in the process to solve a number of minor mysteries concerning Masonic ritual, including the meanings and origins of words like cowan, cabletow and tyler, which occur in Masonic ritual and nowhere else in the English language. His best evidence centers on the English Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

In 14th Century England life sucked for all but a very few people. You worked hard and were paid little if you were freeborn and nothing if you weren't. You had no rights at all. Anything you grew or built or invented belonged either to the king or the pope. Malnutrition was a way of life, and if you were caught hunting on land that belonged to an aristocrat you could be beaten or executed. The penalty for criticizing the church was that your lower lip would be cut off. And if you did it again, you had another lip, didn't you?

Into the mix add frequent crop failures from 1315 to 1318 and then a big famine in 1340 then follow that up with three plagues and a simultaneous war with Scotland and by 1350 the population of England had gone from 4M to 2.5M. Life's a bitch!

For a moment there seemed to be a silver lining to the cloud. The labor shortage caused by all your friends and family dropping dead meant that for the first time ever, a commoner could get some meaningful cash for his labor. The authorities didn't like the idea of working people having economic clout, so they passed the Statute of Labourers which, among other things, fixed wages at preplague levels. Also at about that time the Hundred Years War had begun, so that meant increased taxes. Landowners who wanted to reduce the cost of their human resources could hire a lawyer to comb

genealogies to discover freemen who had descended from serfs, thus forcing them into unpaid servitude.

WAT TYLER'S REVOLT

There's only so much a people can take, and in 1381 a peasants' rebellion occurred, organized by reform-minded parish priests in contact with a shadowy, secretive "Great Society" and led by a guy called Walter the Tyler. Now it may be that tyler is an obsolete spelling of the occupation roof tiler, but Robinson contends that tyler in this case is sergeant at arms of a Masonic lodge, a natural choice to lead a violent mob. During this insurrection, there was a great deal of lopping off of heads of aristocrats and upper church officials, lawyers and authority in general; but the mob seems to have been deliberately guided toward the destruction of property, particularly property belonging to the Knights Hospitaller and the Church. One piece of Hospitaller property was spared, that temple which had been the principal temple of the Knights Templar prior to the suppression of the order in 1307.

When the king's party finally went out to meet with the leaders of the rebellion, two men conspicuously not in the party were the Archbishop of Canturbury and the prior of the Knights Hospitaller. Tyler and a few men found them anyway in the Tower of London and beheaded them. The young king agreed to parley with Tyler, but Tyler was stabbed by members of the king's excourt as he spoke. As Tyler lay wounded, the king rode to the rebels and announced to them that he would personally see to their concerns. The now leaderless rebellion petered out in London and carried on for a couple more days in outlying towns.

So that's the closest Robinson came to a historical smoking gun. The shadowy Great Society of the Peasant's Revolt has one foot in the Masons, based on the name Walter the Tyler, and one foot in the Templars, based on the fact that the mob singled out Hospitaller leadership and property, the Hospitallers being the rival monastic order which had most directly participated in and profited from the Pope's supression of the Templars.

It's not perfect evidence, but it's pretty good. The troublesome part is the possibility that tyler might be an alternate spelling of tiler. Robinson tries to add weight to his argument mainly in that it just makes so much sense that a man who occupied the position of sergeant at arms of a secret society would be a natural choice to lead a violent rebellion and that a roof tiler would be a less likely leader. Also, from the moment he appeared on the scene he was universally recognized as the leader of the rebellion, even though rioting had

been taking place under other leaders for a couple of days before he arrived. Robinson doubts that could have happened so easily if Wat had been a "tiler" and not a "tyler."

Tyler issued the command that men within 36 miles of the coast should stay put, lest the French take advantage of the upheaval in order to stage an invasion. Tyler was a man used to giving commands and apparently accustomed to having those commands carried out, which in this case they were. Further, these commands covered ranges miles from London and coordinated concurrent rebellions as far north as Scotland. Robinson takes this coordination and discipline as evidence that a command structure was in place and ready to go when the rebellion erupted. That's a lot to expect of a roof tiler, but all in a day's work for a sergeant at arms of a secret society.

THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

For supporting evidence, Robinson backtracks to the history of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon. These guys were soldier monks who fought in the crusades and had as their stated purpose the aid of pilgrims traveling from Europe to the Holy Land (from West to East, and possibly the other way, too). To accomplish this, they maintained chains of castles, supply depots, armed escorts, banks, secret intelligence networks, farms, vineyards, ranches and so on throughout Europe and the Middle East. In modern terms they were a diversified multinational religious and financial corporation which became stinking rich offering support services to the crusades.

For example, if you were a young knight on your way from Paris to Jerusalem, you could carry a box of gold with you with which to purchase supplies along the way. You could camp in the woods exposed to robbers while you sleep. Or you could deposit your gold with the Templars in Paris and carry a note for the amount with you like a traveler's check. Templar facilities were conveniently spaced and feed, pack animals, supplies, even armaments could be purchased there and debited against the note you carried.

Of course, these notes were just that. Handwritten notes. In order to guard against the possibility of disbursing gold to people carrying forged notes, the Templar clerics developed secret signs, and ciphers, apparently accidental marks, tears, and the like which one Templar could use to authenticate a document written by another a thousand miles away and presented by a stranger. When you're handing out gold, you want to be sure. Also with a large geographically diffuse organization requiring the frequent disbursement

of funds among its members, you have to know that the guy you're handing the cash to is a brother Templar and not a fake. So they developed other secret signs, handshakes, knocks and so on, manners of speaking and dressing that would allow them to identify their own. Those signs, customs, raps and marks would have to be standardized throughout the order across Europe and the Middle East from the Atlantic to the Euphrates.

In this way, Robinson begins to pile up a mountain of circumstantial evidence. The Templars did this --the Masons do something similar. The Templars had ciphers and secret grips -- the Masons have ciphers and secret grips. The Templar order took its name from the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem -- elements of Masonic ritual revolve around the construction of the Temple of Solomon. Masons wear sheepskin aprons, Templars wore a sheepskin loincloth under their robes. The Templars were monks and called one another "brother." Masons refer to themselves as "brother" Masons, and since the Templars were a French order, "brother Mason" might once have been "*frère maçon*" which is transliterated into English as "freemason."

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

While we're on the subject of French, there's an old French word "tailleur," meaning "one who cuts." The pronunciation approximates "tyler," and it would be an appropriate name for a man who is stationed at an entrance to a Masonic lodge with his sword drawn and deciding who does and doesn't "make the cut."

Still on the subject of French, there's a phrase in Masonic ritual, "cowans and eves droppers" which has confused people over the years. Nowhere else in the English language does the word "cowan" appear, but there's an old French word "couenne" which is pronounced kuh-WAHN and means ignoramus or bumpkin. The French word for protective gesture is *geste du garde*, which Robinson posits as the source of the Masonic identifying gesture, or "due guard" for each degree. There's an old French equivalent for the enigmatic "cable-tow" as well, although its meaning is not all that surprisingly a rope used tie down a ship.

Still on the subjects both of French and the Temple of Solomon, the biblical telling of the story of the temple's construction names the chief builder as Hiram. The Masonic version gives him a last name, Abiff. That last name is not mentioned in the Bible. But in French, "*Hiram à Biffe*" means "Hiram who was eliminated," or perhaps "Hiram, the guy who got whacked," which

is exactly what happens to Hiram in the Masonic telling of the story, not in the biblical version.

There was a pirate city in Muslim North Africa known as Mahadia. Robinson speculates that the Templar fleet escaping from La Rochelle might have gained refuge in a Muslim port like Mahadia, possibly referring to it as "Mahadia the Good." In French, *Mahadia le Bon*, later shortened to "mahabone," is the substitute word for the one that was lost at the death of Hiram Abif.

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE ORDER

King Philip of France and Pope Clement conspired in 1307 to arrest the Templars on trumped up charges of everything from blasphemy to buggery (the usual accusations in the time of the Inquisition). Once confessions were tortured out of them, their lands and fortunes would be forfeit, turned over to Philip and Clement, and their real estate and charter turned over to the Knights of the Hospital of St. John -- the Hospitallers.

That was a lot of wealth. At the time, the Templars had property every few miles from Scotland to Egypt and from Portugal to Palestine. In addition to that, they were lending money to every nobleman in Europe and renting out their knights as mercenaries and security guards. They were managing agricultural property for a fee. They were required to recognize no political boundaries within all cristendom and were bound only by the laws of their own order, so they acted as bonded couriers, political messengers and mediators. If there was a dispute between a feudal lord and some church authority, the Pope might have dispatched a couple of Templars to settle the matter instead of an army of soldiers.

So concentrated within that order was more money and power than any individual king in the world. Although they were sworn to obey the pope, it's easy to see that Clement could have seen them as a threat, like having a lion in your house, even if it's YOUR lion....

The arrest operation was a disappointment for Philip and Clement. Templars in Germany simply declared their innocence and offered trial by combat to anybody who cared to cross the Rhine and say that. When the order was outlawed five years later, one assumes the Templars would have entered civilian life or joined the Teutonic Knights or some other order. Templars in Portugal and Spain changed their names to the Knights of Christ and melded into the feudal systems of those countries. The English King stalled for

almost a month before carrying out the pope's order, so that by the time he had to make the arrests, all the treasure and all the Templars had vanished. And in Scotland, well, forget it. Any pain in the pope's neck was a friend of the Scots.

Even in France much of what wasn't nailed down was gone when the soldiers showed up to arrest the Templars. Only a few older members of the Order stayed behind, letting themselves be arrested. Possibly they hoped to delay the authorities so the others could make good their escape. Possibly they thought they had the best chance of legally defending their charter. Whatever the reason, only a small fraction of the Templars were ever apprehended. The 18 ships in the Templar fleet vanished from their port of La Rochelle and were never heard from again. This might explain why a man undergoing the rite of a Master Mason is told that this degree will make him a "brother of pirates and corsairs."

BLOODY OATHS AND OTHER MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Robinson demolishes the widely held notion that the Freemasonry arose from medieval stonemasons craft guilds. In his chapter describing medieval craft guilds, he mentions that he visited the archives of some of the world's great libraries in London, Oxford and Lincoln, towns known for having lots of medieval stonework. Although he found documentation for guilds covering everything from vintners to fishmongers to gold wire drawers, he was unable to find even one documented instance of a medieval guild of English stonemasons.

A Mason swears to keep the order's secrets under the threat of having his body chopped into pieces, his throat cut, his tongue ripped out by the roots, his entrails burned and many other gruesome fates. What secret could a stonemason have that requires that kind of oath? This wasn't just a matter of "cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." Guys running from the inquisition would have a good reason to require that kind of oath from his brothers, because that "burning entrail" stuff is right down the inquisition's alley.

Masonic membership requires that the candidate be freeborn. Like Masonry there were three classes of Templars, (Knights, Sergeants and Clerics) all of which were required to be freeborn. Masons require a professed belief in a Supreme Being, but require that the specifics of religion not be discussed in the lodge. Doesn't make much sense from the point of view of a stonecutter's

union, but regarding men evading religious persecution it makes a lot of sense.

THE OLD CHARGES

Some of the oldest documents in Freemasonry, one dating right back to the fourteenth century, are known as the Old Charges. This is a short list of rules about how Masons are to treat one another. One rule goes that a Mason may not reveal a secret that would result in a brother Mason losing life or property. A Mason may not have illicit sex with the female relations of a brother Mason. A Mason visiting a town should not go about the town unless escorted by a brother Mason who can vouch for him. A Mason passing through is to be given two weeks' employment by a brother Mason, then given some spending money and sent on his way to the next lodge.

Seriously, doesn't this sound like rules of conduct for an underground railroad? And what possible relevance could these rules hold for a craft guild of stonecutters?

SO WHERE DID ALL THE STONEMASON STUFF COME FROM?

According to Robinson the veneer of stonemasonry is the most convenient available cover story. If a bunch of guys are gathered in an inn and the authorities burst in wanting to know what you lot are up to, you're a bunch of Masons relaxing. Scattered around the room can be seen rules, compasses, squares and mauls. A suspicious authority can't verify your name with the roll of the local stonemason guild, because as Robinson discovered to his surprise earlier, there were no stonemason guilds in England. Masonry was the perfect unfalsifiable cover for an underground organization. They couldn't very well pretend to be fishmongers. Their names would have to be on the rolls at the local fishmongers guild. Not only that, it would be hard to keep your lodge secret due to the telltale aroma of mackerel.

Ritual might have arisen around the stonecutting paraphernalia early on. In this way, even people who didn't know or care anything about the Templar suppression could be recruited and used for the underground railroad and still have some ritual that they could make sense of, innocuous parables about self-improvement.

At some point all the Templars are going to die of old age and the original purpose of the secret society dies with them. However, those original

Templars persecuted by their monarch and their church had over the course of their lives recruited a body of men who were anti-pope and anti-authoritarian while on the surface being churchgoing, taxpaying upright citizens. That's the kind of men they would have to recruit. So by the time of the Peasants Revolt of 1381, the secret lodges consisted entirely of men who thought that common people were getting screwed by the authorities, and when a revolt spontaneously broke out, the post-templars (or proto-Masons if you prefer) were ready to leap to the fore and aim the mob at the specific authorities which they considered to be the source of the most immediate social ills.

Of all the connections with Masons and Templars that Robinson links to the Peasants Revolt, none of them involve the, rule, maul, compass, square and so on. It's tempting, but not really warranted to say that the Masonry trappings were added after 1381. The clues are just too sparse to be that specific.

So if there's an intellectual inheritance the Masons got from the Templars it's anti-authoritarianism, anti-tyrannism. You can't read the Bill of Rights (written by Masons) without hearing the echoes of Masonic ritual. For example, the constitution prohibits the establishment of a state religion, Masonry also leaves religious observance to the conscience of the individual.

Perhaps those Masonic sermons about improving one's self bit by bit and rebuilding Solomon's Temple brick by brick are an admonishment favoring gradual improvement of our political environment, and warning against the mistake made by the Great Society when it tried to uproot all authority in one grand violent swoop. If this is the case, the addition of the Masonic trappings would have occurred after 1381, and the story of Hiram Abiff, the builder murdered before the Temple could be completed, roughly corresponds to the story of Wat Tyler's revolt.

JUBELA, JUBELUM AND JUBELO

In the story of Hiram Abiff, the three Jewes (or Jubes) named Jubela, Jubelum and Jubelo, use the implements of their lower degrees, the setting maul, the rule and the square, kill Master Mason Hiram in an attempt to get the Master's Masonic secrets before the completion of the Temple. They hide the body, which is later "raised" and properly buried. Later in the story they wail mournfully that it would have been better to have suffered the fates of their bloody oaths than to have killed their master.

In a medieval church there's a thing called a "rood screen." It's a latticework screen on which is hung a cross. In a spot in front of the rood screen is where monks do their penance in front of the assembled order. In France, that screen is called a *jubé*. There's a french colloquialism *venir à jubé*, which means "to do one's penance," and the three Juwes in the story certainly were loudly and publicly penitent.

Robinson interprets this story as the naming of parties guilty of the attempted destruction of the Templars. Hiram represents not any one person, but Masonry itself and the three Juwes represent the Crown, the Pope and the Hospitallers, the three conspirators of the arrest and suppression.

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SECRET OPERATION

Masonry, whether or not it was called that, operated in secret in Britain from 1307 to the formation of the Grand Lodge of London in 1717. That's over four hundred years. How is that possible? Robinson's explanation is that Masonry was formed around refugees fleeing religious and political persecution. The Pope kept right on burning heretics, and England was Protestant/Catholic off and on right up through Elizabeth I. Once established, a secret organization that protected heretics would have no trouble finding new members. Masons wouldn't have felt safe about revealing themselves unless England was a political non-catholic superpower and her heretics protected by law, thus making secret lodges unnecessary. In 1685 the last claim of a Catholic to the British throne fell apart. In 1701 it was made law that the British Royal Family would be members of the Church of England. Shortly thereafter the Grand Lodge of London was formed.

Masonic Lodges have from time to time served their ancient purpose right up through the twentieth century. While outlawed by fascist countries in WWII Europe, some Masonic lodges went underground in the old fashioned way and served as the foci of resistance efforts. Masonic initiations are even said to have taken place in prison camps, using a pair of sticks to inscribe a circle in the dust, just as described in Masonry's oldest rituals, the ones most closely resembling the Templar secret rituals.

In the WWII example, Masonry provided what the Templar organization provided 640 years earlier, a force in readiness, a pre-existing organization with a tradition of secret communication and a charter focused on religious and political tolerance.

YOUR HOST COMMENTS

There's lots more in this book (The Masonic mosaic pavement resembles the black and white Templar *Beau Seant*, for example.), but if you aren't convinced by now, doubling up on the coincidences isn't going to convince you. If you're interested in the material, get a copy of "Born in Blood" and read it for yourself. The author's reasoning is impeccable, even if he does stretch things a bit at times. For example, the proposed etymology of the word "mahabone" is little more than a guess. To his credit, when he does put forth a weak argument he's not shy about letting you know that it's a weak argument.

Most of his arguments are pretty strong, however, and given that the Templar trail has had seven centuries to cool, Robinson has put together a wholly convincing argument for the proposition that the three degrees of Craft Masonry are rooted in the fugitive Knights Templar in hiding in 14th Century England. Period.

Of course the whole time I was reading I was wondering just what you've been wondering. "What happened to all the stuff?" All the treasure that disappeared. Where is it hidden? Then I read the part about the Old Charges and how money was to be distributed to brothers passing through, and how lodging was to be provided and so on. My suspicion is that all that treasure went to hide the Templars, shift them around the country, lodge them in safe houses, find new identities for them, buy them new clothes to replace the monks robes, set them up in new professions and so on and was probably gone within a generation of the suppression. If the fabled Templar Treasure was not spent, it was wasted.

According to Robinson, though, there is a treasure of sorts which might yet exist. Along with the Templars and their treasure and their fleet, their records also vanished. This would include everything from membership rolls to expense accounts for military expeditions to wine recipes. Those might still be around, maybe all in one place, maybe in fragments, maybe dispersed throughout the world, but maybe somewhere. In 1717, when a few London lodges "went public" and Masons first publicly admitted that Masonry existed, a number of Lodges, fearing persecution, panicked and burned their records. Let's hope the Templars didn't do that back in 1307.

THE SON OF A WIDOW

One place where Robinson and I disagree is in the interpretation of the story of Hiram Abiff. Robinson represents the story as a *roman a clef* with the three Juwes representing Clement, Phillip and the Prior of the Hospitallers. While this reading is valid, I think there's a more reasonable interpretation that is more introspective from the Mason's point of view. Hiram represents not any one person, but Masonry itself and the three Juwes represent the impatient elements of the membership who very nearly destroyed the secret order in a premature attempt to accomplish its goals. As evidence for this proposition recall that Hiram was killed by Masons with implements pertaining to all three degrees of Masonry.

The point that the workers proceed in the rest of the story repeatedly mentioning that no plans were left for the workers by the master builder might indicate that the executions at the end of the Peasants' Revolt effectively removed the leadership of the secret society. And at the end of the story they install a makeshift Mason's secret word to take the place of the genuine article until somebody comes along who can figure out what that secret word was. It's an allegorical expression of the order's loss of purpose.

I find Robinson's explanation regarding mention of a Widow's Son a little vague and cursory. He holds that every Master Mason symbolically becomes Hiram Abiff, the son of a widow, the phrase being merely a description of Hiram. I interpret that phrase as an allegorical lament about an absent father. The Templars, a holy order, have lost their Holy Father, the Pope, or in Latin *Papa*, literally, father. The Templars are the widow's son. The Pope is the absent father.

