

The Mysterious Disappearance of the Templar Fleet

In 1574, the Scottish Parliament decreed that all gypsies apprehended should be whipped, branded on the cheek or ear, or have the right ear cut off. Further, even more severe, legislation was introduced in 1616. By the end of the seventeenth century, gypsies were being deported *en masse* to Virginia, Barbados and Jamaica.

In 1559, however, Sir William Sinclair was Lord Justice General of Scotland under Queen Mary. although his efforts do not appear to have been notably successful, he nevertheless opposed the measures then being implemented against gypsies. Availing himself of his judicial status, he is said to have intervened on one critical occasion and

saved a particular gypsy from the scaffold.



From then on, the gypsies became annual visitors to the Sinclair estates, which offered them a welcome refuge. Every May and June, they would congregate in the fields below Rosslyn Castle, where they would perform their plays. William Sinclair is even said to have made available two towers of the castle for them to occupy during their stay in the vicinity. These towers came to be known as 'Robin Hood' and 'Little John'.

The designations are significant, for Robin Hood and Little John was a

favourite May-tide play performed by English and Scottish gypsies at the time; and like the gypsies, it had been officially banned, the Scottish Parliament decreeing on 20 June 1555 that 'no one should act as Robin Hood, Little John, Abbot of Unreason or Queen of May'.

There seems to be some doubt whether the troupes received every May and June at Rosslyn were in fact gypsies or a troupe of strolling players. But the fact remains that, whoever they were, they regularly performed, at the Home of Scotland's Chief Justice, a play banned by law. The endorsement of a legendary outlaw would, of course, have rendered 'subversive'; and John Knox's austere Calvinist Protestantism regarded all theatre as 'immoral'.

But the primary reason becomes evident from the phraseology of the decree. 'No one should act as Robin Hood, Little John, Abbot of Unreason or Queen of May'. The Abbot of Unreason is Friar Tuck and the Queen of May is Maid Marion. But both of these figures were originally very different from what later traditions have made of them.

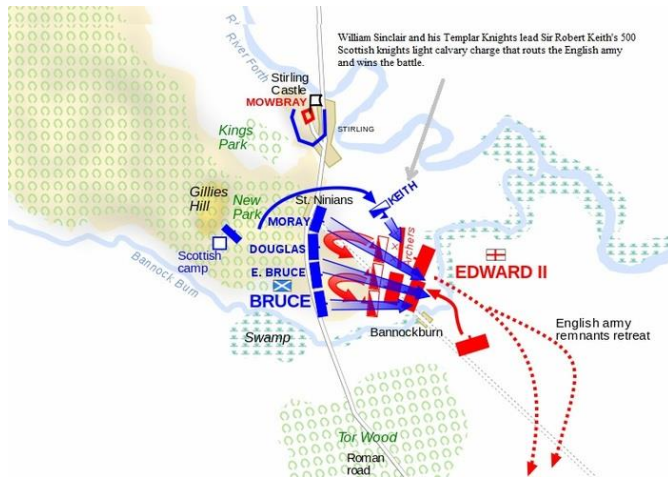
All through the Middle Ages in England and Scotland, Robin Hood was only secondarily the 'outlaw' of Sherwood Forest. His principal identity was as a species of 'fairy' derived from the old Celtic and Saxon fertility God or vegetation deity, the *Green Man*, while in popular folklore Robin Hood was interchangeable with *Green Robin*, *Robin of the Greenwood*, *Robin Goodfellow*, Shakespeare's *Puck* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who, at the summer solstice, presided over fertility, sexuality and nuptials.

The Robin Hood legend provided a handy guise for the reintroduction of the fertility rites of ancient paganism into nominally Christian Britain. Every May Day, there would be a festival of unabashedly pagan origin. Rituals would be enacted around the *May Pole*, traditional symbol of the ancient goddess of sexuality and fertility.

On Midsummer's Day, every village virgin would become, metaphorically, Queen of the May. Many of them would be ushered into the greenwood where they would undergo their sexual initiation at the hands of a youth playing the role of Robin Hood or Robin Goodfellow, while Friar Tuck, the Abbot of Unreason, would officiate, blessing the mating couples in a parody of formal nuptials.

By virtue of such role playing, the orders separating dramatic masque and fertility ritual would effectively dissolve. May Day would be a day of fertility which would produce, throughout the British Isles, its annual crop of children. It was in these sons of Robin that many such family names as Robinson and Robertson first originated.

As the Reformation curtailed the programme of religious building, the guilds of stonemasons had more opportunity to develop their skill in ritual drama, gradually evolving their own rites which became ever more divorced from taboo Catholicism.



Rosslyn Chapel was at its heart with its connections to the Templar Knights who gathered on the west coast of Scotland in 1307 after escaping their persecutors on the continent. In the middle of the thirteenth century, the Knights Templar were the wealthiest and most powerful military order in Europe, formed originally to protect those on Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The Templars invented an early form of banking, which made them even richer...but made them increasingly unpopular with people who had

borrowed money from them. In the last decade of the thirteenth century, the Knights Templar were forced out of the Middle East, after Phillip VI the King of France abandoned them...to escape his indebtedness.

On Friday the 13th of October 1307, with the permission of the Pope, Phillip VI, the key leaders of the Order based in France were arrested and tortured into confessions of devil worship. Phillip VI seized their lands and raided their treasury, but found it much emptier than he had expected.

Across the rest of Europe, the remaining Knights hid their portable treasure, under threat from the Pope who had called for their arrest. The vast treasure of the Knights Templar largely disappeared and has never been found.



An equally intriguing mystery is what happened to the majority of Knights who were never arrested. Several thousand men and their flotilla of ships simply vanished. In particular, 18 ships that had been berthed at La Rochelle, France, on the night of the 12th of October 1307 set sail under the cover of darkness just before the initial persecutions and either disappeared from history...or not.

Instead they seem to have fled to the deep fiords of Scotland, where the fleet of ships came under the command of the St. Clair family of Rosslyn Chapel. St. Clair and his Templars made a voyage to Canada in the year 1298 AD, nearly 100 years before Columbus. Later, this fleet of ships and new ones to come, flew the Skull and Cross Bones...the symbol of the Knights Templar...and preyed on the ships of the Vatican coming from the rich ports of the Americas and were ultimately known as the Pirates of the Caribbean.

In this historic context, it is highly significant that the St Clairs sanctioned, welcomed and protected, the pagan rural theatre instead of the Christian miracle plays of the urban Catholic guilds. The *Green Man* is everywhere in Rosslyn Chapel, peering out at every turn from liana-like tendrils which he himself engenders. His head...for there is never a body attached to it...is like the heads the Templars were accused of worshipping, or the severed heads of ancient Celtic tradition, both of which were talisman of fertility.

Rosslyn not only provided an ideal milieu but might have been designed specifically for their 'gypsy theatre'. The dominant theme of the chapel, underlying all the elaborate Christian overlay, is unabashedly pagan and Celtic. The figure that occurs most frequently is the *Green Man*...a human head with vines issuing from its outrank sometimes it's ears, then spreading wildly, in tangled proliferation, over the walls. Rosslyn thus invokes both the Templars and the archaic Celtic kingdom of Scotland which Bruce sought to restore.