





# What is Scottish Freemasonry?

Some have referred to the 18th century as the age of Freemasonry. It was certainly the age of Fraternalism with many new organisations promoting mutual aid and encouragement. The 18th century was very much a time of change, the age of 'Enlightenment'. With this change however came revolution. Some Freemasons on the continent became even more secretive than previously to escape the effects of persecution from the authorities. Handshakes and other modes of recognition which had been used by the trade crafts to identify each other became even more important as did the ideals of equality and fraternity. Many historical Enlightenment figures were Freemasons who became involved on both sides of the Jacobite uprisings and on both sides of the French and American revolutions.

Robert Burns became a freemason in 1781, age 23. Marie Roberts, in *Burns and the Masonic Enlightenment* states that Freemasonry not only spoke out for the ideals of 'liberty, fraternity, equality', but also was responsible for the creation of nationalistic feelings and fervour, as a number of Freemasons played prominent roles in the American and French Revolutions.

## The connection between Rosslyn Chapel and Freemasonry?

Rosslyn Chapel was built by the Operative stonemasons but has nothing to do with modern Freemasonry in terms of any explicit symbolism. Rosslyn would have been a hive of activity during the period of construction, with many craft guilds on site. There are many symbols in the chapel, particularly the 'masons' marks'. Each stonemason had his own symbol, and this was used to mark his work, to ensure that he was properly paid for his labour.

Some Freemasons today see Masonic symbols in the carvings of Rosslyn Chapel. In particular, some believe that some of the angels are carved in poses that are used in Masonic rituals. Since the chapel pre-dates the establishment of the Masonic lodges in Scotland, this is seen as proof that Freemasonry is much older. The only problem with this is that the particular angels which are seen as Masonic are from the 19th Century, and probably commissioned by the Fourth Earl of Rosslyn, himself a Mason.

[www.rosslynchapel.com](http://www.rosslynchapel.com)



One of the many masons' marks in Rosslyn Chapel.

Masonic groups interested in hearing the local lodge's interpretation of carvings at Rosslyn Chapel can arrange to walk round with a member in return for a donation to the lodge funds. Local lodges familiar with Rosslyn may have used some of its carvings to illustrate allegorical stories within their own ritual dramas. These meanings are personal to the lodges, and do not represent an authoritative interpretation that would be recognised by the stonemasons who carved the image. Here at Rosslyn Chapel, we hear many different claims as to the meanings of particular carvings, no two the same! We ask only that you bear that in mind when listening to individual interpretations.

## Acknowledgements

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Robert Cooper – Grand Lodge of Scotland

Ian Robertson – Local historian

Local Lodge Rosslyn St Clair – Jim Munro

## Useful Reading

Robert Cooper, *Cracking the Freemason's Code*, Rider 2006

Christopher Hodapp, *Freemasons for Dummies*, Wiley Publishing Inc 2005

Marie Roberts, 'Burns and the Masonic Enlightenment', in *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*, Aberdeen University Press 1987

For further information on Scottish Freemasonry, the website link is [www.grandlodgescotland.com](http://www.grandlodgescotland.com)