

# Scottish Templars at Balantrodoch and Roslin

By  
Sir Knight Sanford Holst

**B**alantrodoch was the Knights Templar headquarters just outside Edinburgh. If you can find a way to include Scotland in your travel plans, it is definitely worth a visit to Balantrodoch. Here you experience a little of Templar life the way it was when their encampment flourished during the Crusades.

The most visible sign of that storied past is now the ancient Templar church where they came to kneel and pray in white robes embroidered with their large red cross. The roof of the church is long since gone, but the solid walls that once

echoed to their footsteps still remain.

After services the knights walked to their manor house, located where the small town of Temple stands today. From the main road, you turn left into the lane between the houses and continue into an open field. There you find a stone arch that is believed to have been their gatehouse entry. The manor would have rested just beyond, among the cluster of trees.

One of the most intriguing things about this preceptory was that it stood only four miles from the castle of the St. Clair barons—the builders of Ross-



The old church still stands in Balantrodoch.

lyn Chapel. When Freemasonry emerged many years later, that family provided the first Grand Master of Scotland. As a result, legends abound that the St. Clairs were part of a link between Masonry and the Templars.

From Balantrodach, Templars riding northwest on their horses could be sitting at the St. Clairs' dining table within half an hour. Whether the Templars came seeking donations or on more profound matters we do not know. But they continued to be close neighbors for almost 180 years.

From Roslin it was only an hour's ride north to Edinburgh Castle.



Entry way to the Templar manor at Balantrodach.

## History

Hugh de Payens, the first Grand Master of the Knights Templar, came riding into Scotland in 1128 to recruit knights and seek donations of land and gold. He received the gift of Balantrodach and made it his major Scottish encampment. Although some suggest that this donation came from the St. Clairs, it is now generally agreed that it was given by King David I of Scotland.

However, de Payens had gone on the First Crusade with Sir Henry St. Clair, so some financial or other support would reasonably have been given by the baron.

## Roslin

Around 1307 the St. Clairs began to build their new castle in Roslin at the same time the Templars were attacked by king and Church. During the following

century, they began to raise Rosslyn Chapel which added more fuel to the fire of esoteric activities and connections to the Knights Templar. The castle and Rosslyn Chapel can still be seen today.

## Edinburgh and the Grand Lodge

Edinburgh Castle stands at one end of the popular Royal Mile district, and Holyrood Abbey is at the other. Now in ruins, this abbey was the site of the Scottish Templars' trials in 1309.

A half mile north of the castle you find the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Grand Secretary David Begg was graciously supportive when we talked about the research I was doing into the early days of Freemasonry. Curator Robert L. D. Cooper provided information about Rosslyn Chapel that was much appreciated.

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## To Get There

A city bus runs from central Edinburgh to Roslin making that an easy trip. Getting to Balantrodge is a little more adventurous. A city bus also goes in that direction but only as far as Gorebridge which is two miles away. A better plan is to hire a car which lets you visit Balantrodge and Roslin on the same day.

### Rosslyn Chapel

Chapel Loan

Roslin, Scotland EH25 9PU

Telephone: 44-131-440-2159

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

### Grand Lodge of Scotland

96 George Street

Edinburgh, Scotland EH2 3DH

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Sir Knight Sanford Holst is the author of *Sworn in Secret: Freemasonry and the Knights Templar*. He is an historian who lectures at universities in the United States and overseas. Holst is also Senior Warden of the Southern California Research Lodge, a 32° Mason, and a member of the Los Angeles Commandery No. 9 Drill Team. His websites include [www.MasonicSourcebook.com](http://www.MasonicSourcebook.com) which is read by 600,000 people each year. He can be contacted at:  
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