

# The Baldwyn Rite of Bristol, England

A Cohesive Remnant of Pre-1813 Freemasonry  
by **Sir Knight David S. H. Lindez**

In 1813, the Duke of Sussex officially de-Christianized the rituals of Craft Freemasonry in England<sup>1</sup>, thereby ostracizing the degrees beyond the craft and dismantling the cohesiveness of systems native to individual provinces. From region to region, the collection of orders and degrees varied composing a variety of rites which is still evidenced today, not only in the variance of rites available on the continent, but in the vast array of craft degrees and all their diversity as practiced under the United Grand Lodge of England. One famous anomaly which persisted in an insular fashion to preserve its working is that of the Baldwyn Encampment, which claims to exist from time immemorial<sup>1</sup>. Oral tradition maintains that the lodge records were burned during the Stuart rebellions<sup>2</sup>, but the oldest documented record extends back only as far as December 20, 1780. This document refers to the Baldwyn Encampment as "The Supreme Grand and Royal Encampment of the Order of Knights Templars of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitallers and Knights of Malta..." going on to proclaim the "MOST EMINENT GRAND MASTER The Grand Master of the Order" and closes with "Done at our Castle in Bristol 20th day of December 1780."

Sympathetically, perhaps even defiantly, the Bristol Rite in 1813 reacted to the Hanoverian suppression of various Masonic grades of Knighthood by acting as a depository for those in neighboring regions. They adopted the Knight of the Sword and Eagle, the Nine Elu, the Order of Kilwinning, and Knight of the East and absorbed them all under their covering. However, the conclave of the Baldwyn Encampment located in London<sup>3</sup> slipped into abeyance until the Duke of Sussex later died in 1843. Once revived, this conclave in London attempted to usurp the authority of the Bristol Masons and asked that they submit to the newly revived London conclave. The Bristolians refused, and they reasserted their authority over the entire workings of the Baldwyn Encampment. A compact was later established in 1862, reading "Under the Banner of the Grand Conclave of Masonic Knights Templar of England and Wales" where it was agreed to give precedence to the Baldwyn Preceptory as a Provincial Grand Commandery and/or Priory unto itself with demonstrated empowerment to work all the degrees of the Bristol Rite, including that of Malta. The Ancient & Accepted Rite's claim to the Rose Croix degree was also disputed, and the Treaty of Union of 1881 ensured that the Baldwyn Rose Croix chapter was recognized as being both superior<sup>4</sup> and independent.

The Baldwyn Encampment considers the craft degrees to compose the first degree. The Bristol workings are the oldest in England, and the use of the loud bang behind a candidate's ear in conjunction with the bringing to light is a definite marking of its antiquity and Stuart origin. The Holy Royal Arch is considered to compose the 2nd degree. The Royal Arch degree worked in Bristol for the Baldwyn Rite is the only one in England to employ the passage of the veils as found commonplace in the United States. The Baldwyn Encampment works the 3rd to 5th degrees under its own sovereign powers.

These are peculiar to it alone. After the 5th degree, if the candidate already has the Knight Templar, Knight Malta, and Rose Croix degrees in other bodies, then he is, in effect, a full member of the Rite. If a candidate has not taken these degrees elsewhere then he takes the Knight Templar and Knight of Malta degrees in Baldwyn Preceptory which is under warrant from the Great Priory of England. The rituals worked are the old ones from the time period when these two degrees were controlled by the Baldwyn Encampment itself. They constitute the 6th degree of the Rite. Lastly comes the Rose Croix of Mount Carmel, the 7th degree of the Rite in the Baldwyn Chapter of Knights Rosae Crucis (Time Immemorial) which, like the Knight Templar Preceptory, has agreed to come under a central authority in this case the Supreme Council 33° for England and Wales. Again, it works a peculiar ritual in which the candidate presents himself in the garb of an English Knight Templar as is done in Ireland. Visiting Rose Croix Masons may visit the Baldwyn Chapter only if they are also Knights Templar, a requirement unknown outside of Bristolii.

The Grand Superintendent of the Baldwyn Rite is, by virtue of his office, always the Provincial Prior for Knights Templar in Bristol, England. His province has only the one Baldwyn Preceptory in it. He is also the Inspector General 33rd for The Supreme Council 33° of Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales. His district has but a single Rose Croix Chapter in it. So in Bristol, the Rose Croix degree is the seventh of seven degrees and not the 18th of 33iii.

The Baldwyn Rite is composed as follows:

I° Craft

II° The Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch

(The Five Royal Orders of Knighthood)

III° Knights of the Nine Elected Masters

IV° The Ancient Order of the Scots Knights Grand Architect

V° Knights of the East, the Sword and Eagle

VI° Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes, and Malta and Knights Templar

VII° Knights of the Rose Croix of Mount Carmel

4 In the sense that it is recognized as being the oldest

ii Smith, Lumley (1931) letter correspondence with L.P. Newby

iii Wilson, Bruce (1939) letter to Harold V.B. Voorhis

1 Inclusive of the Holy Royal Arch

2 A most common happening. For more on the matter, see Trevor Stewart's work on the subject in his 2008 work Journey Into the Vault

3 Established in 1791 by Thomas Dunckerley, Prov. Grand Master & Grand Superintendent for the Bristol Rite

i Mackey, Albert G. (1909) Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

The rituals of the Bristol Rite (especially those of the Knighthood degrees) are not copied and are closely guarded by its members. They do not exist in any published form. It is a

rarity to witness, but in December of 2007, one of the degrees of the Bristol Rite was actually performed outside of England for the first time ever. The Entered Apprentice degree was exemplified in full dramatic form in the Gothic room of the Grand Lodge of New York in Manhattan in front of a packed audience of New York and New Jersey Masons by members of Beaufort Lodge No. 103 as a favor to their host, Very Worshipful Brother Jason Sheridan, A.G.L. of the First Manhattan District and Secretary of St. Johns Lodge No. 1 A.Y.M. Brother and Sir Knight Jason Sheridan<sup>5</sup> was later that week made an honorary member of Beaufort Lodge No. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Morton Commandery No. 4 (famous for its conferral of the Orders in the Episcopal Cathedral of the Church of the Incarnation in Manhattan's historic Murray Hill section)

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