

## **Another Thought About The Origins Of Freemasonry**

By

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There are many thoughts, speculations and even fantasies about the origin of our Craft. The one thing everyone seems to agree upon is to disagree with everyone else. Let me offer another thought this day — possibly no more convincing than any of the others — - certainly no less convincing either.

For centuries the Romans had built stone edifices in what we now call England, — Administrative buildings, residences, temples and roads. Lots of roads.

The demise of Rome began in earnest during the reign of the Emperor Glycerious (473—474 AD). The Vandals, descending upon Rome during the reign of Julius Nepos (474—475 AD), caused that emperor to expedite the recall of the Roman Legions from Britain. The final hours of the Empire were in the reign of Romulus Augustus (475—476 AD), who is commonly considered the last emperor of the Western Empire. In those last days of the Empire, emperors had a noticeably short tenure.

With the recall of the Romans, there was no one left in Britain to maintain the stone buildings or to erect new ones.

The local indigenous population not only did not build in stone but they were extremely superstitious about any stone construction. The closest they would come to it was building their wood and straw lean-tos against the sides of the stone buildings. No stone masonry at all. And none for another 150 years.

Around 622 AD, a monk of the Benedictine order (named Benedict Biscoff) found himself in the area of what is now Weymouth, England. Being a bit frustrated with all the variances and

misapplications of the Order of his namesake, he set off for Rome to petition Pope Boniface V (619—625 AD) to permit him to establish a monastery at the mouth of the Wyer River. He made two trips to Rome to visit Boniface V in attempts to accomplish his goal. Neither adventure was successful in any manner except that he "became known" in the Holy City — and to some as a pest. (The term "stonewall" had not been in common usage at that time).

Boniface V was called to his just rewards in 625 AD, and, being a rather interesting character, in his own right, one can only wonder what those rewards might have been. At any rate, our hero - Benedict Biscoff - decided that with Boniface V now being out of the way he might have better luck with the new guy, Honorius I. Taking advantage of the fact that Honorius was new to the office and quite busy carving "his mark" on the Throne of Saint Peter, Benedict set off once again, for Rome. This third attempt also met with disappointment because Honorius was "indisposed". (Just when WAS the term "stonewall" first used??)

Undaunted and a determined fellow to be sure, Benedict struck out once more for Rome. (Unfortunately this all took place before the age of "frequent flyer" miles). He arrived there late in the year 626 AD. To his great surprise, Honorius not only granted him an audience but also granted his wish to establish his Abbey in Weymouth. (There are several schools of thought as to what "persuasion" was used by Benedict, none of which, however, should concern us today). Benedict and his close followers fancied themselves as builders — or perhaps even architects — and were excited about the opportunity that lay before them, however daunting the task might have appeared.

In his many travels to and from Rome, Benedict had ample opportunity to observe and to study the stone buildings and edifices of France and Rome. He took the time to speak with and to learn what he could from these "builders in stone".

On his final return to Britain, Benedict persuaded (Ah, there's that word again) numbers of these craftsmen to travel to Britain with him. Actually, he persuaded a few, who acting under his authority shanghaied many more.

These craftsmen, now under the authority of Benedict, who had the authority of Pope Honorious' charter in his pocket, traveled "freely" to their new home in Britain.

With the new Abbot, Benedict, and his monks supervising, the stone masons (now free stone masons) began their work on the Abbey of Wyermouth. The Abbey and its cathedral and associated buildings were arguably among the first "non-Roman" works in stone in modern Britain. These masons proved themselves so capable and efficient that Benedict, for a time, "hired them out" to various nobles who wanted their own stone buildings. Probably the first "sub-contractors" in history. And, quite possibly the first Free Masons as well.

Thank you for your time and attention.