

**Joseph of Arimathea: The Secular Perspective: Documentation of Rome's Tin Supply in England; First-Century Sea Routes; Joseph Was a Metals Merchant for Rome; The Traditions: The Harlein Collection: Jesus at Cornwall: Jesus' Well, Place Manor Church, & Tunic Crosses**

This highly popular metal was extremely valuable during the time of the Lord's silent years. It is essential for the manufacture of bronze, the formula for which varies but it approximates 95% copper, 4% tin, and 1% zinc.

All these metals were found in Cornwall or Somerset. The scarcity of tin at the time made England the chief source of the metal for the Roman Empire. Joseph of Arimathea was their chief agent to buy ingots or transport these metals back to Rome's smelters of bronze.

**Diodorus Siculus (the Roman historian) writing in the first century B.C., describes the metal trade and writes of how the Phoenician ships, "voyaged beyond the Pillars of Hercules into the sea that men call the ocean."**

**During the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. the Phoenicians sailed the "Hippus," a long-range, deep sea-going craft that could remain at sea for a year or more. Archaeological evidence of these Phoenician ships are [sic] found on wall reliefs excavated from the palace of Sargon II in Assyria.<sup>1</sup>**

The major first-century sea route from the Levant was based at the port of Tyre in Phoenicia. Joseph's travels to the west would have started from here and he would have developed close relations with the Phoenician sailors who were famous for their expertise as both shipbuilders and mariners:

**Three outstanding reasons account for the world-famous commercial activities of the Phoenicians. (1) Their conquest by the Israelites around 1380 B.C. which deprived them of most of Palestine and crowded them on the narrow ribbon of coast land extending from Accho north of Mt. Carmel to Ras Shamra-Ugarit more than 200 miles north. Thus hemmed in to the coast of northern Palestine and southern Syria, they took to the sea and became one of the most distinguished seafaring peoples of history, founding commercial colonies on the shores and islands of the Mediterranean as far west as Spain. They seem to have gone past the Pillars of Hercules to secure tin from Cornwall, Britain.**

**(2) The mountains which approach close to the narrow coastal strip further confined the Phoenicians and was [sic] a factor in their seafaring exploits. (3) Another circumstance was the plentiful yield of pine, cypress and cedar trees for shipbuilding. The two greatest ports were at Tyre and Sidon.<sup>2</sup>**

Since the production of quality bronze was in such high demand throughout the Empire, Joseph had to be an expert in metallurgy. Here's an example of why:

**Tin is smelted from cassiterite at a temperature of about 1100°C. Smelting was as much an art as a science and depended upon the skill of the smelter who judged from experience when the molten tin was ready for casting into ingots.**

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<sup>1</sup> E. Raymond Capt, *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, rev. ed. (Muskogee, OK: Artisan Publishers, 1982), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 862.

Thus it was that the aid of Joseph of Arimathea, who later became the patron saint of tin miners, was invoked at this critical point in the process. A bar of smelted tin crackles when bent, the so-called 'cry of tin'—a sign of its purity. This 'cry of tin' does not occur if any impurity remains. Cornish tin ingots were generally well over 99% pure.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph made numerous trips to the southwest of England and on occasion the Lord would accompany His uncle on these trips. Legend has it that he did so as a youth and as an adult. These legends have become traditions in England and the narratives, accounts, and icons that relate them are retained down to this day in song and story.

### F. The Traditions

Some of what we are about to note are chronicled in the historical documents of England many of which are collected in the Harley Library held in the British Library in London.

The Harleian collection today comprises more than 7,000 manuscripts, 14,000 charters, and 500 rolls. Although most are in European languages, including a sizeable number in Greek, the library also includes items in Hebrew and in various Oriental languages.<sup>4</sup>

The documents held in the Harleian Library do not go back farther than the late seventh century so the references we will cite depend on tradition for their veracity and therefore require us to accept the integrity of the original source.

Tradition is defined as “a body of beliefs or stories that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable.”<sup>5</sup> Some of what we will observe falls under this category and are referred to, among other things, as the Traditions of Glastonbury.

What follows are several of these traditions which are current even today in England. Some have been transferred by word of mouth while others come from documentable, but not all verifiable, sources.

#### Jesus at Cornwall:

There are indications in the Gospels that the Lord did not spend his silent years in Palestine but instead traveled elsewhere and in doing so was at first chaperoned and later accompanied by His uncle Joseph.

These journeys are said to have taken him to the southwestern peninsula of England and the counties of Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset, an area where the minerals for making bronze were in abundance and thus attracted the attention of the Roman government and their metals broker, Joseph of Arimathea.

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<sup>3</sup> Glyn S. Lewis, *Did Jesus Come to Britain? An Investigation into the Traditions that Christ Visited Cornwall and Somerset* (East Sussex, GB: Clairview Books, 2008), 21, 23.

<sup>4</sup> The British Library, “History of the Harley Library.”  
<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/manuscripts/harleymss/harleymss.html>

<sup>5</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v.: “tradition.”

The strongest and most persistent traditions place a young Jesus in Cornwall and the Isle of Avalon near the little Somerset town of Glastonbury in England.

A number of legends link the boy Jesus, and Joseph of Arimathea his uncle, with the tin mines of Cornwall. One story relates how Jesus and Joseph often anchored their ship in the natural harbor at the mouth of the Camel River to come ashore and collect water for the ship:

Nearby, is an ancient well that since olden times has been known as "Jesus' Well." For centuries pilgrims came to the well and the remains of a chapel, erected over it, are still discernible. Records of its existence go back to the 13th century, but even then, the date and origin of its name is unknown.<sup>6</sup>

Associated with the mines of Cornwall are the mines of the Mendip Hills, north of Glastonbury in the county of Somerset, England. During Roman times these mines produced lead, copper and other metals which form alloys with tin. The great war-machine of the Roman Empire consumed vast quantities of these alloys in the production of weapons. There are traditions among the people of the hill country of Somerset that Joseph, after first seeking tin from the Scillies \si'-lə\ (islands off of Cornwall) and in Cornwall itself, came to the Mendips accompanied on a number of occasions by a youthful Jesus.

At the parish Church of Priddy, high on the top of the Mendips, they have an old saying: "As sure as our Lord was at Priddy." And a carol sung by the children of Priddy begins, "Joseph was a tin merchant," and goes on to describe him arriving from the sea in a boat.<sup>7</sup>

The old ordinance maps of the west part of Cornwall show two rich lodes or veins of tin, bearing the names "Corpus Christi" (Body of Christ) and "Wheel of Jesus." (Wheel is an old Cornish word for "mine.")

Another link between Jesus and the tin trade of Cornwall is found in St. Anthony-in-Roseland. Here is located an almost unknown structure called Place Manor Church with a Pre-Norman stone arch over the South Door. Carved in this arch are ancient pictographs, estimated to be more than a 1000 years old, telling the story of Jesus and his uncle coming to Place for tin. According to the pictographs their boat got into difficulties during a storm, and was washed ashore on the headland where the modern lighthouse now stands. The operators of a local trading post managed to bring Joseph's damaged boat into the sheltered side of the headland, by Place, where repairs were carried out. Joseph and Jesus stayed at the trading post while the boat was being repaired. The pictographs go on to say that before they left the area, they erected a stone with an account of their visit there.

Scattered throughout the tin mining areas of Cornwall are to be found a number of very ancient Celtic crosses called Tunic Crosses. These crosses, found alongside roads and in church cemeteries, are of a type found nowhere else in the British Isles or anywhere else in the world, for that matter. States E. Raymond Capt:

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<sup>6</sup> Capt, *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

On one side of the cross is a crudely cut Christian cross and on the other, the figure of what can only be a boy dressed in a knee-length tunic. Here we have not a crucified Messiah, nailed to a cross, but a youth with His arms outstretched in an attitude of blessing. These crosses may well portray the age-old memory of the visits of the young Jesus to these shores in the company of His uncle Joseph.<sup>8</sup>

Ivor C. Fletcher uncovered a tradition in Upper Galilee that tells of a visit by the Lord to Glastonbury:

Among the Maronite villagers of Upper Galilee the tradition lingers that Jesus as a youth became a shipwright on a trading vessel from Tyre.

According to the story, He was storm-bound on the western coast of England throughout the winter. The location of the visit is given as the Summerland, a name often used in ancient times for the modern county of Somerset. A district associated with this visit to Somerset is known as Paradise. This place is sometimes found on old maps of the area.<sup>9, 10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 33–34.

<sup>9</sup> Ivor C. Fletcher, *The Incredible History of God's True Church* (1984; repr., Bristol, UK: Ivor C. Fletcher, 1995), 13.

<sup>10</sup> John D. Keyser, *Joseph of Arimathea and David's Throne in Britain*, <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/i000111a.htm>.