

THE TEMPLE CHURCH LONDON, ENGLAND

by

Sir Knight Robert F. McCabe, Jr.



The Order of the Knights Templar was a very real presence in medieval Europe. Jerusalem was the center of the Christian World, and much importance was given to visiting the "Holy City." Jerusalem was the center of medieval maps, and Christians looked at pilgrimages to Jerusalem as a way to have their sins forgiven. For those who could not make the pilgrimage, contributions to the Knights Templar provided an alternate way to achieve absolution and became a funding source for the Knights Templar. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Knights Templar were said to own as many as 9,000 manors in Christendom. They also received gifts of gold and silver which, coupled with the rents from their lands, provided the finances needed to support the Order's work in Jerusalem.

The Knights Templar was a religious-military Order founded in Jerusalem in 1118, after that city had been conquered by the Christians in 1099. As part of the vows of knighthood, the Knights were required to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The order's purpose was to guard Jerusalem and to protect pilgrims going to and from Jerusalem.

The order was strongly supported by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a prominent religious leader of the time and sanctioned by Pope Alexander III, who exempted the order from paying tithes and taxes. The order's direct allegiance was to the Pope, and it was a crime under penalty of excommunication to strike a member of the order. The order was very successful and quickly spread throughout Europe. It came to England in 1128, when Hugh De-Payne, then Grand Master of the Knights Templar, made a visit to London.

London became the center for the Knights Templar in England. The Knights initially settled in the Holborn area of London where the British Museum and the Grand Lodge of Free Masons are located today. The Order outgrew the Holborn location in 1161 and moved to its second location in the Strand. This was due south of its first location, and its land extended from Fleet Street to the River Thames. It was at this location that the Temple Church was built. The church was begun about 1162 and was consecrated in 1185 to the Blessed Virgin Mary by Heraclius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The Church was round, as were all Templar Churches, to commemorate the Church



of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. In 1240, there was an addition which now forms the main part of the Church.

The area adjacent to the Church was used for dormitories for the Knights. It also had gardens and orchards to provide food for the Knights. The order continued to grow from gifts of land and money, and established numerous sites throughout England and Ireland. The land was farmed or rented for others to farm, and the money was sent to the Knights Templar in Jerusalem to continue to support the mission of the order. Jerusalem was eventually retaken by the Arabs, and the order became the prey of those desirous of its wealth. On Friday, October 13, 1307, the Knights Templar and all their property were seized by Order of Pope Clement, V at the urging of Philip, IV of France, known as Philip “the Fair” (and yes that is the origin of Friday the Thirteenth being considered unlucky). The King of England, at that time, was Edward, II, the son-in-law of Philip “the Fair”. He resisted the request to seize the Templars and their lands but after he was urged to do so by the Pope, acted on November 22nd to

seize the property of the order in England. The Knights were arrested, and the order was suppressed. As you probably know, the Vatican has recently released papers which show that the charges against the Knights Templar were without merit. The last Grand Master, Jacques DeMolay, was burned at the stake in Paris by Philip “the Fair” on March 18, 1314. There is a tradition that Jacques DeMolay, in his dying moments, challenged the Pope and the King to meet him within the year before the judgment seat. Both Clement, V and Philip “the Fair” were dead within a year.

Thereafter the lands, at least in England, were given to the Knights Hospitaller who continued to own them until 1540, when Henry, VIII seized all the Church land in England, proclaimed himself head of the Church, and made the lands crown lands.

About 1322, the Templar’s land in London was rented by the Knights Hospitaller to two law colleges which came to be known as the Middle and the Inner Temples. In 1608, the Middle and the Inner Temples petitioned King James I to have the land given to them, and on August

13, 1608, King James, I granted a charter giving the land which formerly belonged to the Knights Templar to the Middle and the Inner Temples in perpetuity on the condition that they maintain the Temple Church, which they have done.

England has a two level legal system. The paper work is done by the solicitors, and all cases tried in the High Courts must be tried by the barristers. All barristers are trained in the Inns of Court. There are four Inns of Court. They are: Grays Inn, Lincolns Inn, the Middle and the Inner Temples. In 2008, the Middle and the Inner Temples celebrated their four hundredth year as owners of the Temple Church with many special events at the Church.

The Temple Church is a regular Church of England church and is open

to the public having a full schedule of church services along with organ recitals and lectures and serves as a location for weddings, funerals, and special religious services for members of the Middle and the Inner Temples.

The Church has gone through many changes since 1185. An organ has been installed, and it has been remodeled several times. It escaped the great fire of London in 1666, but not the air attacks in World War II. On May 10, 1941, it was bombed and largely destroyed. Some of the Round Church survived; including the entrance door, but the roof, organ, and much of the rest of the Church was destroyed. After the War, the Temple Church was rebuilt and was rededicated in 1958, with Queen Elizabeth, II in attendance.



knight templar

During the great fire in London in 1666, the fire came dangerously close to the Church, and there was no water to fight the fire. The brave barristers were forced to use beer as a substitute and were successful in preventing the fire from reaching the Temple Church. They were also aided by the Duke of York, later King James, II who supplied the gun powder used to destroy some smaller buildings and help save the Church. The barristers later were required to sue the City of London to be reimbursed for the beer and, of course, were successful.

On the Templar grounds are presently located the Middle Temple Hall, The Inner Temple Hall, and numerous other buildings which act as chambers for the barristers and for those aspiring to be barristers. Each hall has a large dining room where the barristers and students have meals. There was traditionally a bar that separated the room, with the barristers sitting on one side and the students on the other. When a student was thought to be ready to be a barrister, he was called to the bar and questioned by the barristers. If the student was sufficiently qualified, he was admitted to the bar and permitted to join the ranks of the barristers.

The Temple Church has the effigies of several Knights lying on the floor of the Round Church. It is not clear whether the Knights are actually buried there or in the court yard outside, but in the 12th century, it would have been a great

honor to be buried in the Round Church, which represented the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which was said to have been built where Christ was buried. In the Middle Ages in Europe, Jerusalem was the center of the Christian world. To the Christians of the Middle Ages, Jerusalem truly had great significance, all of which was represented by the Temple Church.

If you visit London and would like to visit the Temple Church, you are welcome to do so, but you should first make sure it will be open when you visit. It is open most afternoons if the Church is not having a private event, but you would be well advised to check the Church schedule on the internet. The Tem-

ple Church is located near Fleet Street on Inner Temple Lane and is only a short walk from the Temple underground station.

Between the Church and the Inner Temple Hall there is a column with a horse with two riders. This was an early Knights Templar symbol. You will also note that the emblem for the Middle Temple is the "Lamb of God", a symbol we still use today. If you visit the Temple Church, you should walk around the Temple grounds, and you will be sure to see the symbol on the Middle Temple Hall door.

The interior of the Temple Church has an altar designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the famous architect who designed St. Paul's Church, which was built after the great fire of 1666. The altar had



One of the common symbols of the ancient Templars was that of two knights riding the same horse.

been removed and placed in storage during one of the renovations of the church and was therefore available when the church was rebuilt in the 1950's.

The Temple Church is truly remarkable both for its history and for its beauty. It deserves to be placed high on the list of every Knight Templar who visits London.

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