

# NOTES

ON THE

Original Knights Templar,  
their Property in London,  
and its Transfer to  
:: its Present Owners ::



Addressed to the Members of the Cotteswold  
Preceptory of St. Augustine, No. 72,

May 10th, 1915, by

J. ARTHUR TRENFIELD,  
MARSHAL,

P.M., P.Z., P.P.G. Asst. D.C., P.P.G. 1st Asst. Soj.

*N. J. Page*

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SOME months ago, I happened to be reading an article in a London paper on the Temple in London, now the head-quarters of Barristers, and my interest was aroused in its history and connection with the old Knights Templar.

From remembrance I am inclined to think the reasons put forth as the cause of the expulsion of the Knights Templar and the confiscation of their property were both incorrect and inconclusive.

After the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70 of the Christian era, Palestine for upwards of two centuries continued in the condition of a miserable Roman province, inhabited by a mixed population of Pagans, Jews and Christians; and heathenism triumphed.

On the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire by Constantine in the year 321, this state of things was changed. Palestine and Jerusalem became objects of interest to all Christians, and crowds of pilgrims went to visit the localities made sacred by the Evangelists.

From 321 to the year 980, the treatment of these pilgrims and the resident Christians varied according to the general aspect of the times, and the disposition of the reigning Calif.

About 981, under the Fatimite Califs of Egypt, the Christian inhabitants of Palestine, as well as the pilgrims to the Holy Shrine, were treated with the utmost cruelty. They were robbed, beaten, and sometimes slain, on their journey, and this state of things became worse when the Turkish hordes invaded and conquered Palestine in 1065.

In his history of the Knights of Malta, the Abbé Vertot, says: "No description can give a conception of all the cruelties the Turks committed; they would have destroyed the Holy Sepulchre had not their avarice restrained them. The fear of losing the revenues raised upon the pilgrims of the West preserved the tomb of our Saviour."

In the year 1081, the whole of Asia Minor was in the possession of the Turks, and not one out of three pilgrims to the Holy Land from Europe returned to recount his hardships, or to thrill the hearts of his relatives and fellow villagers at home with descriptions of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre.

The Pope had given his sanction, support and blessing to a Crusade. All Christian countries were visited by enthusiasts, who preached *crusade*. Amongst these was Giraldus Cambrensis, who journeyed through England and Wales, and the historian, William of Malmesbury, says: "There was no nation so remote, no people so retired, as not to respond to the Pope's wishes. The Welshman left his hunting,

the Scotchman his fellowship with vermin, the Dane his drinking party, and the Norwegian his raw fish."

In the spring of 1096, when all was completed and ready, the expedition set out, but it was not until July 15th, 1099, that they entered the city, and the banner of the Cross floated on the walls of Jerusalem.

This brings me roughly speaking to the time when the Society or Order (half military, half ecclesiastical) of the Knights Templar was founded, some account of which is the object of this short pamphlet.

The origin of the old Knights Templar was very similar to that of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St. John, after the conquest of Palestine by the Crusaders.

Pilgrims from Europe were frequently molested and robbed by the Turks on their way to Jerusalem, and to defend Christian travellers from the attacks of these roving bands of infidels, in the year 1119, a Burgundian Knight, Hugh de Payens with Geoffroy de St. Omer, formed an association of a religious character. The members of this Order were known as Knights Templar, or Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. Their vows included forfeiture of worldly possessions, and implicit obedience to their elected chief, their principal aim in life being to defend the Christian

faith against the infidel, and to protect pilgrims to Jerusalem and other sacred places in the Holy Land.

Six or seven other knights joined them immediately; historians termed them "half monks and half soldiers, who took an oath to guard public roads, live in poverty, chastity and obedience, and in those days their poverty was very real, for tradition tells us that Hugh de Payens and his friend Geoffroy de St. Omer owned only one horse between them, a circumstance alluded to in the Seal of the Temple, which shows two knights on one horse.

To these knights Baldwin I. King of Jerusalem, gave part of his palace lying next to the former Mosque of "Al Aksa," the reputed Temple of Solomon, hence their name.

The Order consisted of knights, chaplains, sergeants or esquires besides menials or craftsmen. All were bound by the rules of the Order, and enjoyed its privileges.

The Grand Master was Head of the Order, who had great, but not absolute authority, for in important matters, such as attacking a fortress, declaration of war, reception of a new brother, he had to consult the Chapter; he had also to obtain consent to the nomination of Grand Commanders of the Provinces. All the lesser offices were absolutely in his gift.

He was allowed four horses, and his household consisted of a cleric, a frater serviens (with two horses), a Saracen secretary as interpreter, a soldier, a farrier, a cook, two footmen, and also two knights of high rank in the Order.

When on a campaign he used a large round tent, near which floated the two standards of the Order, one black and white, symbolizing the powers of light and darkness, and the other a white standard, charged with the red cross of the Order, emblematic of martyrdom.

The Second officer was the Seneschal, who had right to attend all Chapters. His equipage was the same as the Grand Master's, with two esquires, a knight companion, a secretary in deacon's orders to say the hours, a Saracen secretary, and two foot servants.

The Third officer was the Marshal, who had supreme military authority. He had charge of all the horses and arms, and acted as Master in the absence of the Grand Master.

The Provincial Marshals were absolute in their provinces, but subordinate to the Grand Marshal.

Here in passing I would like to make the observation that the Order of the Knights Templar of Freemasonry, although a comparatively modern institution, represents a certain phase of the great historical organisation which was to some extent a

secret fraternity, and established in almost every kingdom in Latin Christendom.

In 1128, at the request of the Grand Master, St Bernard drew up the statutes of the Order.

Henry 1st gave the Order lands in Normandy. Alphonso 1st, of Arragon, left them the third of his kingdom, and Louis VII. (France) gave them a piece of marsh land outside Paris, afterwards known as the Temple, which became the head-quarters of the Order in Europe.

King Stephen in England gave them the Manors of Cressing and Witham in Essex, and his wife Matilda, Temple Cowley and Sandford in Oxfordshire. This preceptory of Knights Templar, from which Temple Cowley derives its prefix, was founded in the 13th Century, but about 1274 was removed to Sandford, and to this day there are some remains of the building in use as a farmhouse, the chapel serving as a barn.

The Order also possessed property of great importance in Bristol, including Temple Church (with the leaning tower); the original foundations indicate that the end of the nave was oval. A railway station is built on what was once their land, and still bears the name of Temple Meads, or "Meadows of the Temple."

In Gloucestershire the Manors of Pegsworth, Lower Dowdeswell, Amford, Nishange, the Church



of Down Ampney; and lands at Temple Guiting, Frampton and Little Rissington were held by the Order.

In Worcestershire, the Manor of Templars Lawern, lands in Flyford Flavel, Temple Grafton, Hanbury and Temple Broughton; but who were the benefactors of the Gloucestershire and Worcestershire properties is unknown. Their names include Hastings, Harcourt, Lacy, Clare, Mowbray and others.

With these grants of land, in very many instances, the words "*also the windmills*" occur, proving that each parish or manor owned one.

The Order also had possessions in almost every country in Europe, about 9,000 Manors, and according to Matthew of Paris their annual revenue was estimated at £5,000,000.

As houses of the Temple increased, Sub-Priors were appointed, and spiritual privileges were granted as lavishly by the Pope as were temporal possessions by the people.

The Templars had many privileges above ordinary people, which led to abuses, and those who lacked right erected Temple Crosses on their buildings so as to obtain similar privileges, as Templars were exempt from excommunication and interdicts, and did not pay tithes.

The active history of Knights Templar is practically the history of the Crusades, for 20,000 of these

our ancient brethren perished in the attempt to hold the holy place of Christ's religion for Christendom, and most of their Grand Masters died in battle or from wounds.

In 1187, the Temple at Jerusalem was lost to Saladin, and the Order was then established at Antioch. Their chief house in England was Without Holborn Bars, on the south side of the street where Southampton House formerly stood. The church they erected in 1185 was a circular building, to perpetuate the idea of the round tents of the Templars. The oblong portion, now the nave, was dedicated some fifty years later.

As their riches increased they somewhat departed from their original simplicity, and raised more extensive buildings; they purchased a large space from the White Friars, Without Temple Bar, erected a magnificent convent, and designated it New Temple, the original building having been known as Old Temple.

Their houses were used as strongholds for Royal treasure, and as banks for debtors of foreign usurers to pay their dues; in fact, they became the greatest international financiers and bankers of the age.

The Order lent to Henry III. and to Edward I., and to avoid the sin of usury, the borrowers as mortgagors, in lieu of interest, paid rents or annuities, calculated at a high figure, part of which was to serve to redeem the debts.

Kings frequently resided in the Temple, and there is good reason to believe that King John was a resident when compelled to sign Magna Charta.

To the Parliament holden in the 29th year of the reign of Henry III. were summoned sixty-five Abbots, thirty-five Priors, and the Master of the Temple, who sat in Parliament as the first baron of the realm. A very convincing proof of the enormous power our ancient brethren then possessed.

Their extreme wealth was probably their downfall, for they became a power which Kings feared, and accusations were brought against their faith and morals, which gave a handle to their enemies, viz., that of denying Christ, spitting on the Cross, and many other offences of a wicked and gross character, many of which were never proved.

At Paris, on the 12th May, 1313, many of the French Knights Templar, with their Grand Master, Jaques de Molay, were burnt alive, in the presence of King Philip IVth, an act characteristic of an age in which virtue was the victim of power.

In December, 1311, the Knights Templar were imprisoned, and the chief House of the Order, with other property, was seized by King Edward II., who committed the care of the Temple to James le Botiller and William de Basing, and two years later the Temple was granted to Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke.

Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, claimed the Temple by escheat, as immediate lord of the fee, and on

October 3rd, 1315, in consideration of other lands being handed over to him, the Earl of Pembroke, remised his right to Lancaster, who held it six and a-half years. The latter was executed at Pontefract.

The Temple was then re-granted to the Earl of Pembroke. He was slain June 23rd, 1323. He left no heir, so it reverted to the Crown. The King granted it to Hugh le Despenser, the younger, at the very time that an Act of Parliament was passed, conferring all lands of Knights Templar to Knights Hospitaller of St. John.

Hugh le Despenser ignored this Act, and held the lands until his death, September 24th, 1326, and he was the last private possessor of the Temple.

When Edward II. was imprisoned, his son, Edward III., seized the Temple, and committed it to the keeping of the Mayor of London, who promptly closed the Watergate, and incommoded the lawyers in their progress to Westminster. At this period the first distinct mention of a society of lawyers in the Temple occurs.

In 1333, Edward III. committed the custody of the Temple to William de Langford for ten years, at a rental of £24 per annum.

The Pope, Bishops and Hospitallers vigorously exerted themselves to obtain a transfer of the property, claiming that the Church, Cloisters and other places were consecrated and dedicated to the service

of God, and had been unjustly occupied by Hugh le Despenser and others.

About three years later, Edward III., in consideration of the sum of £100, which he needed for his expedition to France, granted to the Prior, Philip Thane, all the residue of the Temple then remaining in the King's hands, to hold with the cemetery, cloisters and other sanctified places, to the said Prior and his heirs for charitable purposes for ever.

It is interesting to note how the chief house of the most Holy Order of the Temple of Solomon in England was converted into a law university.

After the Norman Conquest the study of the law was confined to ecclesiastics, for clerks and priests practised as advocates till about the time of Stephen, when they began to abandon tribunals, and the study of law, and it then became necessary to train laymen to transact law business.

It was about the year 1330, when the lawyers established themselves in the Temple.

An ancient document, formerly belonging to Lord Somers, and apparently written by a member of the Inner Temple, states that the lawyers made a compact with the Earl of Lancaster for lodgings in the Temple, and they came and have continued ever since.

The Judges of the Court of Common Pleas were made Knights (the earliest record of knighthood

for services purely Civil), and Professors of Common Law assumed the title of Freres serjens, or fratres servientes, so that knights and serving brethren similar to those of the ancient Order of the Temple were revived.

Whilst the Knights Templar were in captivity in London and York, the King paid their servants and retainers their pensions, on condition they gave the lawyers the services due to their ancient masters.

About 1381, the rebels, under Wat Tyler and Jack Straw, went to the Temple, pulled down the houses, entered the Church, took all books and rolls of remembrance they could find, and placed them in a large chimney and burnt them.

Many rules, customs and usages of the Society of Knights Templar are to this day observed in the Temple, proving that their domestics became connected with the legal society, and transferred their services to them.

We may take as an interesting example one or two of their punishments. For quite a light fault the Ancient Templar was withdrawn from the companionship of his fellows, and not allowed to eat with them. For improper conduct, the modern Templar is expelled from hall and put out of commons. The ancient Templar for a grave offence, in addition to above, was deprived of his lodgings, and made to sleep in the open court. The modern

Templar is temporarily deprived of his chambers, and padlocks are put on his doors.

While the lawyers were occupying the Temple, the Hospitallers reserved to themselves the chapel, and the officer who acted as keeper or guardian of the church was known as Master of the Temple, and had a hall and lodgings for himself, a custom which still exists.

The joint occupation of the Temple by the Lawyers and Hospitallers continued till the reign of Henry VIII., when an Act of Parliament was passed, dissolving the Hospital, and vesting the whole of the property of the Brethren in the Crown.

In 1609 James I. granted the Temple to the Benchers of the two law societies, their heirs and assigns for ever, the Benchers paying the King £10 yearly for Inner Temple, and £10 yearly for Middle Temple, and this fee was paid until the fee simple was purchased for £80 by the Temples in the reign of Charles II.

Undoubtedly, both Knights Templar and Hospitaller departed from the original object of their foundation. The chief cause of their downfall seems to have been jealousy of their extraordinary wealth.

Very few remains of Ancient Knights Templar exist beyond the present church. The Inner Temple Hall was their hall, but so altered and repaired as to have lost every vestige of antiquity. It was almost entirely rebuilt in 1816.

The original of this hall was the far-famed refectory of the old Knights Templar, and the old custom of hanging around the walls the shields and armorial devices of the ancient Knights is still preserved by the lawyers: each succeeding Treasurer of the Temple still places his coat of arms on the wall, as in the high and palmy days of the warlike monks of old.

At the western end of the hall a considerable portion of the ancient convent still remains.

A vaulted arch of the same beautiful architecture as the oldest part of the Temple, forms the roof of the buttery, and an apartment beyond contains a vaulted ceiling of unusual merit.

In the cellars are old walls of immense thickness, and the remains of an old window, a curious fireplace, and elegant pointed Gothic arches.

And to day, if one wanders through the Temple's peaceful precincts one may pause for a moment to watch the gallant Templars once again assembled in martial garb. There, on those quiet and cloistered lawns, amongst the shades of their departed ancestors, do they march and drill, being trained worthily to uphold the law of Christ against the infidel Turk, and valliantly to defend the weak against the modern Hun.