



## *The Overy Papers*

### **Number 31 - The Knights Templar and Freemasonry**

Fraternal Greetings Brethren

The subject that has caused me, as a lodge historian, to be questioned more than any other is the Knights Templar story and its relationship to Freemasonry. I have always found this is one of those subjects that differs depending who you talk to. So this evening I will try and put it into perspective as I see it as an Historian. I am also doing this to celebrate the return of the Fraser Valley Chapter of the Order of DeMolay once more. It will also be of interest to those who would like to join the Royal Arch and continue to the Preceptory.

#### **First to the Facts.**

The Knights Templar were formed about 1119 just after the First Crusade, when a French Nobleman, Hugues de Payens, collected eight of his relatives, who were also Knights, and formed the Order

Their original mission was to protect pilgrims on their journey to visit the Holy Places and King Baldwin of Jerusalem, allowed them to set up headquarters on the Temple Mount. This was the reputed general area where Solomon built his Temple and they were lodged in the Aqsa Mosque, which was assumed to stand on the actual site of Solomon's Temple. Before long they became known as the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, which was eventually shortened to "Knights Templar".

For the first nine years very little was heard of the Order of the Knight Templar until in 1129, when they were officially sanctioned by the church.

They started a fund raising campaign in Europe where they asked for donations of money, land, or noble-born sons to join the Order and they implied that donations would help to defend Jerusalem, and ensure the charitable giver, of a place in Heaven.

They were criticised at first because religious men should not bear arms. But their patron a leading churchman stated it was a "just war", which allowed "taking up the sword" to defend the innocent and the Church from attack. So, he

legitimized the Templar's, and they became the first warrior monks" of the Western world.

In 1139, even more power was conferred upon the Order by Pope Innocent II, who issued the papal bull, that stated that the Knights Templar could pass freely through any border, owed no taxes, and were subject to no one's authority except that of the Pope.

Of course not all Knights Templar were warriors. Most of its members were used to acquire resources which could be used to fund and equip the small percentage of members who were fighting on the front lines.

There were actually three classes within the order. The highest class was the knight and they wore white robes. These were the leading fighters.

Second was the priest class who wore green robes and was similar to the modern day military chaplain. They conducted all religious duties and did the record keeping and ran the financial and business empire.

The most common class were the mounted men-at-arms and they wore black or brown robes and were partially garbed in chain mail or plate mail. These were the main support staff members and held many positions, including guard, steward, or squire. As the years passed many of this group were no longer needed and they either joined other religious groups or joined the French Armies during the 20 year Albigensian Crusade when the Pope tried to stamp out the Cathare Religion in Southern France.

Initially the Templar's were an Order of poor monks, but they started to form a large international infrastructure and many used them as a kind of bank. Their financial power became substantial, and eventually the majority of the members were devoted, not to combat, but to economic pursuits.

And so by 1150, the original mission of guarding pilgrims had changed into a mission of guarding their valuables and they became an early precursor of modern banking. As the 1200's came to an end they owned large tracts of land in Europe, had built churches and castles, and owned many farms and vineyards as well as being involved in manufacturing and import/export.

Jacques de Molay, was to be the last Grand Master and took office around 1292. In 1298 he led the Templars in a brief but unsuccessful campaign in the Middle East that decimated the fighting elite, the current Templar Knights and the last Templar position in the Middle East, was lost to the Muslims.

The Templar's became an order with no a clear purpose anymore but they still had enormous financial power and this created a very unstable situation.

King Philip of France mistrusted the Templar's, as they had declared its desire to form its own "state, within a state" located in the Languedoc area of southeastern France.

The Crusades had made King Philip poor and he was not happy with the situation where the Templar's were institutionally wealthy, paid no taxes, and had a standing army which by papal decree could move freely through all European borders even though without the Crusades in the Holy Land they were left with no battlefield.

King Philip decided this could not continue and at dawn on Friday, 13 of October 1307, scores of French Templar's were simultaneously arrested by agents of King Philip IV, and executed.

In response to this public pressure the Pope instructed all monarchs in Europe to arrest all Templar's and seize their assets and in 1312, Pope Clement V issued an edict officially dissolving the Templers.

In 1314 Jacques de Molay the Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was burned at the stake his ashes ground up and dumped into the Seine, so as to leave no relics behind.

In France hundreds of Templar's were rounded up and arrested but the extensive archives of the Templar's, with the records of all of their business holdings and financial transactions, were never found.

#### **And so the theories and stories started.**

One story was the Templar's had used a fleet of ships to escape arrest in France and took their treasures with them leaving just before they were to be arrested in October 1307. Some say they went to Scotland and then some say they left for North America and buried their treasure in Oak Island, Nova Scotia.

One historian Helen Nicholson argued that the Templar's did use ships to carry personnel, pilgrims and supplies across the Mediterranean but existing port records show they only owned about four warships plus a few other smaller ships, and if they needed more they hired them as they needed them.

These ships were not a fleet in any modern sense and mainly would have been small transport vessels with a shallow draught and suited for use only in the relatively shallow waters of the continental shelf and could not carry enough water to be at sea for long periods.

The Templers in Europe fled to many places one of the main places was England where they had at least 26 Temples the main one being the Temple in London and some to Scotland where they had their HQ in Temple, Midlothian but many appeared to remain in isolated groups.

During the reformation, that occurred about 200 hundred years later, in 1534 Henry the 8th was declared as the "Supreme Head" of the Church of England and all the English Church properties were passed to Henry the 8th.

Many of the members of the Roman Catholic Church fled to France and took many documents and records with them. Henry was not a fool and it turned out all the

important financial records were kept in England much to the delight of later generations of family historians.

One important thing you must remember in the period in history the masons were just one of the working crafts and as such, would not have been even on talking terms with any members of the "Templar Knights". So any social association would have been unthinkable.

The well known Rosslyn Chapel, while a fascinating architectural site, was not built until 1484 and appears to have no Templar connection despite many attempts to make them as such. Mind you it would possibly been built by the Operative Masons in Scotland, many who were short of work now that the period of building cathedrals was coming to an end.

The Newport Tower in Rhode Island USA was another site thought to have been built by the Scottish Templar's but it was Carbon 90 dated in 1993 and was built about 1680.

I never visited Rosslyn but I did Rhode Island and phoned the historian at Rosslyn Chapel. I asked the same question to both of them "what documented proof have you that the site had a Templar connection." The answer from both was almost the same "none but don't knock it, the story brings in the tourists".

In 1986/7 I spent a delightful year working in the Languedoc area of Southern France primarily writing Manuals for the Fokker 50 and 100 aircraft and in my spare time writing a book that started off as one about the Holy Grail and the Templar connection to Freemasonry. On my return to Canada I was given the name of a professor in Medieval History, who was also a brother, who was kind enough to review my work. I am sorry but I don't remember his name. I received the copy back and large sections were marked in red and the note that said: "as an historian you must only use documented information not conjecture. From your work it showed you never found any definite connection between the Templar's and the Freemasons which is hardly surprising as nobody else has found any either."

I did finish the book but with a different slant but I learnt a lot about being a better historian.

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

Bro. Bill Overy

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