

The Knights Templar

The Templars arrived in England in 1128, and established their headquarters in Chancery Lane near to Holborn. They moved in 1184 to a site now known as the Temple, with its northern boundary on Fleet Street and built the Temple Church following the design of their headquarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. They also had other land nearby, including a field known as Ficket's Croft on the north side of Fleet Street, which was used for jousts, training, and exercising their horses; alongside it were set their armourer's forges.

The Knights Templar were a military order of monks founded by a French knight in 1109 in order to protect pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem, which had been captured for Christendom during the First Crusade in 1099. In 1120, they were allowed to make their headquarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. From this, they took their name of the "Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon" often shortened to the 'Templars'.

The order obtained the backing of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the prime founder of the Cistercian Order. In 1129, the Templars were officially approved by the French church. In 1135, Pope Innocent II gave a donation to the Order, and after that, it grew rapidly. In 1139, the Pope granted the Templars exemption from local laws, which meant that they could move freely across borders, were exempt from taxes, and were subject only to the authority of the Pope.

Individuals joining the Order took an oath of poverty, chastity and obedience. Militarily, this made them a very effective fighting force, well disciplined, much practiced, and with a clear chain of command from the Grand Master downward. Only about 10% of the Templars were knights; the remainder served in a wide variety of supportive roles.

The order became very rich indeed, from donations, gifts and legacies, and it evolved a management structure to look after all their land holdings and other wealth. Over time, they became the first international conglomerate, with extensive interests in banking, shipping, and commerce.

As they grew larger and more powerful, so they began to create powerful enemies, most notably the kings who had borrowed extensively from them. The fall of Jerusalem in 1244 followed by the fall of Acre in 1291 removed the main mission of the Templars, and gave the opportunity to Philip IV

of France to move against them. In 1309, the Grand Master Jacques de Molay, and many of the French Templars were arrested. Many were tortured to obtain confessions of heretical practices, and a number were burnt at the stake on the basis of these confessions. The Pope, who was then based in Avignon and under the control of the King of France, then issued a Papal bull which dissolved the Templars, and ordered that all their property be passed to the Knights Hospitallers.

The history of the Knights Templar in England started in 1128, when the Grand Master visited England to raise men and money for the Crusades. King Henry II granted the Templars some land near the River Fleet – this land is now the Inner and Middle Temple, and also contains the Temple

Church, built in the distinctive Templar style echoing the design of their headquarters on Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The Temple Church contains effigies of nine knights, including William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, who is depicted with crossed legs which is said to indicate that he was a Crusader. The Templars rapidly established a large holding of land, scattered all over England. The name Temple occurs in many place names throughout England, for example Temple Meads in Bristol, and usually indicates that the Templars had acquired land in the vicinity.

The Wikipedia article on the Knights Templar in England gives a list of 16 Templar churches in England, and of 10 place names associated with the Order. It also notes that the town of Baldock was founded by them, that Royston Cave has Templar relics, that South Witham in Lincolnshire has the only fully preserved preceptory of the Templars in Western Europe, and that Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire was also one of their preceptories.



Tombs in Temple Church, London. William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke, is in the far right glass case, with his son, the 2nd earl, on the far left



the badge of the Knights Templar, showing two knights on one horse to emphasise their poverty



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Additional notes

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Further Reading: Wikipedia articles on the “Knights Templar” and on the Knights Templar in England, which also give a long list of further sources.