

Inner Temple



The Temple in 1671



Inner Temple Pegasus

JThe Inner Temple is one of the four Inns of Court. The Inns are responsible for training, regulating, and selecting barristers within England and Wales, and are the only bodies allowed to call a barrister to the Bar and allow him or her to practice. It is ruled by a governing council called “Parliament”, and Bench Table made up of the Masters of the Bench (or “Benchers”).

The land now occupied by the Inner and Middle Temples was granted to the Knights Templar in 1184, and held by them until their order was suppressed in 1312. The land was later transferred to the Knights’ Hospitallers. The Hospitallers never occupied the site, instead they rented it out to provide income for the Order. It is thought lawyers became tenants in 1339 when the Court settled permanently in Westminster. They banded together around the hall on the site, and, after a time, came to be called the Inner Temple (to the east of the site) and the Middle Temple (to the west).

In 1381 Wat Tyler’s rebels sacked the Temple, pulling down some of the buildings and burning many of these records. This may have occasioned the rebuilding of the Inner Temple Hall. In 1540, the land was transferred to the ownership of the Crown along with all monastic and church property.

The legal profession underwent a great expansion in the 1500s. Sir Edward Coke, one of the numerous famous lawyers of the Inner Temple of the day, created the Institutes of the Lawes of England, a foundational document to Common Law. In 1608 King James I conveyed the land of the Inner and Middle Temples in fee simple to the benchers “to serve for all time to come for the accommodation and education of the students and practitioners of the laws of the realm.”

The majority of students in this period were the sons of gentlemen, not specifically intending to train as lawyers. The period from admission to call

to the Bar was generally a minimum of 7 years. In term time, the students attended Westminster Hall to see the courts in action and they took part in intricate moots, in which the halls were arranged as courts, with a bar and a bench. These terms gave rise to the terms being ‘called to the bar’ meaning become a barrister” and ‘sitting on the bench’ meaning being a judge.

Legal education declined in the Civil War, it revived in the 1660s along with collegiate dining. The students of the Inner Temple, along with the other Inns earned a reputation of debauchery and gambling during Christmas revelries, as Samuel Pepys noted during a visit.

Charles Lamb who was born in Crown Office Row in 1775 described the Old Benchers as a very singular body of individuals. They were also said to be opposed to all modern fashions, including newfangled comforts, matched by the gloomy alleys and decaying buildings.

The Inner Temple Gardens have a history as long as the Inn itself, its rose flower beds featuring in a scene in Shakespeare’s Henry VI Part 1. The gardens hosted the annual Royal Horticultural Flower Show from 1888, before its move to Chelsea in 1911.

The Inn was revived in 1800s, both as a place of legal education and new buildings were constructed, such as the Library and the new Hall in a neo-gothic style.

During World War II much of the site was bombed during the Blitz, with the Hall, Temple, Temple Church, and many sets of barristers’ chambers entirely destroyed. The rebuilding was completed in 1959 in

Today the Inner Temple is an active Inn of Court with over 8,000 members, and numerous past notable members. These included writers such as Geoffrey Chaucer, Bram Stoker and Kobina Sekyi, leaders of independence movements such as Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi and Tunku Abdul Rahman. It enjoys the status of being the first Inn to call a woman to the Bar in 1921 and other pioneering women such as the first female judge Elizabeth Lane, Dorothy Knight Dix, Eugenia Charles and Lim Benh Hong, and Royal Benchers have included James II, George VI and HRH The Princess Royal.

