# THE TEMPLE PRECINCT, LONDON, IN THE DAYS OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS

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THE Great Fire of London in 1666 was stayed on the eastern boundary of the Temple precinct but in 1678 the Temple suffered a devastating fire of its own. By 1939 the only pre-Fire buildings were the 12th–13th century church, the 16th-century Middle Temple Hall and the early 17th-century Inner Temple gateway. The Second World War caused grievous but not irreparable damage to the first two of these. Both have now been brilliantly restored.

The Temple precinct still retains except to the west its mediaeval boundaries. These were settled in 1161 when the Knights Templars left their London home, the Old Temple, on the north-east corner of Chancery Lane, to take up more spacious quarters, the New Temple, by the River Thames, a convenient place of embarkation for the voyage to Palestine. Before the Templars came it is known that west of the future church stood the stone town-house or inn of the Bishop of Ely and that to its west there ran from Fleet Street to the Thames a public way ending in stairs to a public landing-stage. This lane has since 1677 been known as Middle Temple Lane and the Bishop of Ely's Inn became the headquarters of the Grand Master of the Order in England.

The New Temple was mainly east of Temple Bar and so largely within the boundary of the City of London but it became, of course, an exempt precinct. The land formed part of the Honour of Leicester, held of the Norman kings by the service or office of Steward of England. The then Earl of Leicester, of the Beaumont family, granted the property to the Templars for an annual rent of one pound of cummin and after the suppression of the Order of the Knights Templars in 1312 his heirs successfully claimed the property. It later came to the Crown and in 1338 passed in two

portions to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem: they paid £100 for the freehold of the "consecrated parts" (roughly the church, the Master's House and the Inner Temple of today) and £10 yearly for the rest. As the Knights Hospitallers already had suitable London headquarters in Clerkenwell, the Temple, excluding the ecclesiastical buildings, was let to probably two groups of the legal profession, later known as the Societies of the Inner and Middle Temples, with devices of Pegasus and the Paschal Lamb respectively. Each group paid £10 yearly. After the suppression of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in 1540 the Crown continued this arrangement with the lawyers. It was not until 1673 that the latter secured the entire freehold.

The present division of the Temple precinct is into three parts, occupied respectively by the Master of the Temple and the Benchers of the Inner and Middle Temples. These divisions follow those of the Knights Templars. Firstly, there were the fully-professed knights, with three chargers apiece. Closely associated with these knights were the squires and the serjeant brothers-at-arms, all of the rank of gentlemen and allowed two horses each. Secondly, there were the non-professed armourers, domestic servants and outdoor staff, usually appointed for life. Thirdly, there were the ordained priests and chaplains, appointed by the knights and exempt from ordinary ecclesiastical jurisdiction, as now. Each group had separate quarters.

To begin with the third group, the Temple Church, with a round nave and a narrow probably-apsed chancel, was completed in 1185, when it was consecrated by Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem. The Round has been described as one of the earliest buildings in England conceived and executed in the Gothic style. It has, for instance, Purbeck marble columns, pointed aisle arches and a triforium in place of a gallery. On the other hand, some features of the Round are pure Norman. These include the round and in every other respect typically Norman west doorway, the round-headed windows, the round intersecting arcade arches and the billet motif.

When the limited accommodation provided by the first church proved insufficient the early chancel was superseded by the present beautifully-proportioned three-aisled choir of five bays. These still have the original stone vaults, carried on slender Purbeck marble piers. This eastern extension was consecrated in 1240. Henceforth little is heard of the church except that it

was broken into during Wat Tyler's Rebellion in 1381. Three hundred years later William Emmett under the direction of Sir Christopher Wren carved a fine oak altar screen. This was sold by auction in 1840 but has now been reinstated. The contemporary carved pulpit, with stairs and sounding-board, went to Christchurch, Newgate Street, and was lost by bombing.

Mr. Walter H. Godrey, the consultant architect to the Temple after the Second World War, discovered that the Templars had in the late 12th century erected on the south side of the first chancel a low unvaulted building, 42 ft. by 13 ft., on a lower level than the church because of the drop towards the river of 5–6 ft. in the ground level here. This building, the remains of which are under the western two-thirds of the south choir aisle, was almost certainly the first Treasury. It is well known that the English Templars acted as bankers to the Crown and others and as custodians of royal and privately-owned coin and bullion. This treasure could have been stored very safely in this building, protected from the street by the great church and only approached through that church or from the enclosed or semi-enclosed cloister to the south. Two large lockers on the south side, next to a double aumbry, may have held the Temple church plate. The treasure chests and boxes used by the king and others would have rested on the stone benches along the north and south sides of the interior. As for the Templars' books and documents, all destroyed in 1381, these were kept in hutches in the round part of the church, where several 13th-century burials took place, nine under unnamed stone effigies now carefully restored. The building of the enlarged east end of the church necessitated the part-destruction of the first treasury. Consequently Mr. Godfrey believed that before 1220 the Templars built a similar-sized similarly-protected new Treasury, with a separate chapel over. This stood on the south-east side of the Round and was much later known as St. Ann's Chapel. When the Order of the Knights Templars was being suppressed in England six empty chests, eight coffers and a weight were listed in what seems to have been this building.

The priests and chaplains would have lived in quarters to the east of the church, on the site of the present Master's house and garden. On the south of the cloister stood a little chapel, dedicated to St. Thomas, and the Hall of the Knights, now the site of the Inner Temple Hall, rebuilt for the second time in 1867 but preserving beyond its western end the Templars' double stoned-vaulted

buttery. Eastward of the Hall were several chambers and the dormitory of the knights and the men-at-arms. This dormitory must have been either directly east of the Hall or, as in a monastery, east of the cloister garth. Both sites are covered by later buildings. All the open land south and east of the hall block would have been available for military exercises.

West of the cloisters lived the manual workers, the lay-brothers. Their Norman hall, a stone building of exceptional strength, was on the east side of Middle Temple Lane, on a site now covered partly by Pump Court and partly by Elm Court. Nearby would have been the granary, the stables, the outbuildings and the piggery (30 pigs in 1308). West of the lane was a great garden stocked with fruit trees. The part of this garden outside the old City boundary was later known as the Outer Temple. Edward II granted away this portion to the Bishop of Exeter, who built his town-house there. A later bishop parted with it to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and it then became Essex House. It was not until 1562–70 that the Benchers of the Middle Temple replaced the old Norman hall noted above by the present Middle Temple Hall on the opposite side of the lane. This spacious building, 140 ft. by 101 ft., has the unusual feature of a bay window on each side of the dais. One of the glories of the Hall was its great oak screen carved *inter alia* with Elizabethan-type caryatids and other figures. This was blasted into many thousands of pieces during the 1939–45 war but now after many years of patient work is in its place once more. The other great feature of the Hall is its double-hammer-beam roof in the Perpendicular style but with pure Renaissance detail. Notable also are the high table, too large ever to be moved, and the smaller table said to have been made from the timber of Drake's "Golden Hind".

The Temple Church, the Halls of the Inner and Middle Temples, the lines of many of the gracious 18th-century courts and lawyers' chambers, the new Master's House, together with the narrow lanes and the quiet open spaces all play their part in preserving the long history and the ancient lay-out of the Temple precinct.

*NOTE:* A full account of the recent discoveries, and the writer's reconstructed plan of the precinct, with references, will be found in W. H. Godfrey's "Recent Discoveries at the Temple, London", in *Archaeologia*, vol. XCV (1953).