

## The Heresies

As has already been alluded to, the demise of the Knights Templar came about in a time of political and religious upheaval in medieval Europe, but the question as to whether the Templars were heretics, is hotly debated to this day. This booklet cannot really be concluded without exploring this question.

A quick search online will reveal a myriad of theories, some academic, some esoteric, and some political in both fact and fiction

Certainly the list of accusations levelled against the Templars by King Phillip IV of France ranges from laughable to a modern mindset to simply bizarre. However, “heretical” sects and organizations were not uncommon in medieval Europe, holding beliefs different from those taught by the Roman Catholic church.

Our theatre production explores one line of theory, that the Templars, through their known archaeological explorations in the Middle East, were party to knowledge that would have been extremely unwelcome to the medieval church.

One series of theories, link both the Cathars, a heretical sect in the Languedoc region of France, and the Templars to the concealing of the descendants of Jesus. An “internal” crusade in France saw the fall of the Cathar fortress Montségur in 1244, and our reading for the scriptwriting showed that the final Grand Master, Jacques De Molay is believed to have been born in the same year. This gave us a line into the theory we would use for the theatre show.

This theory on our show, is conjecture for dramatic effect, although I do personally believe that the Templars are likely to have discovered knowledge which would have been seen as heretical, through their links with many countries and peoples and beliefs.

Laura Jury



# The Knights Templar in the SOUTHWEST

This is a booklet created to run alongside the  
South Devon Players Theatre & Film Companys  
2018 production “1307”

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## Introduction

Historically a monastic order of crusading knights in the middle ages, the Knights Templar, more properly known as the Poor Knights Of the Temple of Solomon after setting up their original base at Temple Mount in Jerusalem, in around 1119 or 1120AD, began from humble origins, but soon became a powerful, international organisation, answerable only to the Pope, and institutionally extremely wealthy. They are often credited as the inventors of modern banking.

As the medieval crusades failed, so did the Templars, and in 1307, among accusations of heresy, and treason, the senior members of the Order were arrested in dawn raids. Legend tells that their wealth, seen by eyewitnesses only months before, had vanished. With the accusations of heresy upheld, the Order was disbanded, and the last Grandmaster, Jacques de Molay, burned at the stake in 1314.

The Knights Templar recruited new members from across Europe, who would give their lands and wealth to the Order when they joined. Other wealthy landowners and merchants saw donating to one of the foremost military organizations of the Crusades, as a way to achieve salvation in the next life.

By the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the crusades however were failing. The Muslims, under the leadership of An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, more commonly known as Saladin, had retaken Jerusalem in 1187, and forced the western crusaders back to narrow coastal enclaves along the Mediterranean.

In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the crusaders found themselves beset by the Mongols from the north, and further attacks from the south, led by the Egyptian Mamluks. Shaky treaties were broken, new conflicts sparked, and in 1291 the main crusader port of Acre, fell.

The Templars who fought to the end in Acre, were forced to withdraw to Cyprus, and the West lost much of its fervour for crusading. Left without its main raison d'etre, the Templars became involved in political intrigues and infighting in the West.

Many monarchs, almost bankrupt from their own wars, were jealous of the Temple's wealth, and now questioned the purpose of the Templars. In 1307, in France, this evolved into accusations of heresy against the Order.

## Other Templar links to the Southwest

Thus far, the booklet has aimed to concentrate upon the places depicted directly in our theatre production. However, this is not the sum total of Templar links to the Southwest.

Local rumour (I have no facts to back it up) links the Knights Templar to what is now Lupton House in Torbay near Brixham and Churston. Historically at that point both Brixham and Churston came under the rule of a landowner in Totnes.

The national archives from 1308 also mention Templar ownership of properties in Chudleigh near Newton Abbott, and Wallon near Okehampton both in Devon, Clayhanger near Taunton, while other records and research also indicate the Templars owned a farm near Banrastle, as well as properties in Witheridge, Tavistock and Bideford.

Two crusades, the second (in 1127) and third (1190), set sail from Warfleet Creek in Dartmouth, the sailing for the third crusade being attended in person by King Richard I's commander Richard de Camville and the then Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Robert de Sable.

While the full extent will never probably be known now, and I cannot even claim that this list is complete, these small morsels of information provide a fascinating insight into one aspect of the medieval Southwest,

The inquisition against the Templars reached England later than in France.

King Edward I initially resisted the Popes demands, and the Templars, overall, fared better in Britain than in other countries. The arrests in Britain took place during the winter of 1308, and no executions took place.

While, in line with most inquisitional practice, torture will have happened, and rather unpleasant imprisonment took place (admittedly historians debate the use of torture in Britain at this point), ultimately, following investigations, many Templars were required simply join another monastic house, or to retire quietly.

It is believed that many Templars however fled to Scotland, and hotly debated legends tell that they may have fought the British, later, at the Battle of Bannockburn.

Legends, often Masonic in origin, tell of Rosslyn Chapel, in Scotland, concealing Templar secrets, as most famously immortalized in Dan Brown's novel The Da Vinci Code.

### **The Knights Templar in the Southwest**

In the West, not just England, the Templars held many properties which they had been donated over the years.

The Templars never wasted anything. As pragmatic as they were dedicated to their cause, they put these donated lands to work, raising funds to maintain their operations in the East. Maintaining a single Knight in the East was no inexpensive task. Historically a Knight Templar would have four horses and two squires, as well as the requisite armour, weapons and day to day living for all men and animals.

Lands in Britain, especially the southwest, were put to work as farms, either directly maintained as a preceptory as well, or rented out to tenants.

Templar farms in the southwest from Somerset to Cornwall, were commonly used as sheep farms, with wool being a valuable product in the medieval era.

Back in the Southwest, the Templar properties were largely given over to the Knights Hospitaller, whose legacy continues on to the modern day as the Knights of St John and St Johns Ambulance.

### **Trebeigh**

Trebeigh is a small Cornish village, and was home to a Templar preceptory. Trebeigh was given to the Templars by King Stephen. The preceptory was also linked to the nearby Catherine's Temple Church near Blisland and St Breward.

At this period the Knights Templar are said to have owned much of Bodmin Moor, and many sites are linked at least in rumour to the Templars.

There is also the Cornish village of Temple, far out in the moors.

Bodmin moor acquired a dark reputation, even in the time of the Templars, with local sayings such as “send him to Temple Moor” implying that the person in question should never be seen again.

The Templars outlying farms and preceptories in Cornwall would have provided a safe place to stop for pilgrims travelling to holy and mystical sites such as St Michaels Mount.

Little is now known of the areas Templar past, other than those carvings and some local records which indicate that following the suppression of the Templars, the properties were made over to the Knights Hospitaller, as with many properties around Britain.

And the remote quiet area makes it an ideal hiding place for the characters in our production!

During the suppression of the Knights Templar, many records as to properties in the Southwest were lost, and much has to be surmised from local folklore, or from place names.

### Bristol



The Templars had a big presence in Bristol, as can be seen from the place names, including Temple Meads train station, Temple Church, Temple Rose Street, and more. Bristol being an important medieval port, the Templars were pivotal in the development of the docks and widening of the river to allow for larger ships. From Bristol Templar ships could sail out to the Bristol channel and then south to the French port of La Rochelle where the Templars maintained a large shipping presence.

Directly linked from Bristol, there were a network of nearby farms and smaller preceptories, namely Templecombe and Temple Bruer, in fact historian Evelyn Lord states that from Bristol, the Templars administered their properties as far as western Cornwall. It is also claimed by some that the Templars owned Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel, although no evidence seems to exist to corroborate that.

### Templecombe



Owned by the Templars since 1185, Templecombe in Somerset stands on the direct medieval route between Bristol and Poole, and was the Templar's only preceptory in what is modern day Somerset.

Templecombe is home to one of the more controversial artifacts in Templar history. Carbon dated to the 1280s, contemporary with the ownership of the Templars, a painting was found in the church, during repairs to damage caused by German bombs in World War 2, which has caused a great deal of controversy. The "Templecombe Head" is a painting onto wood, which is assumed to either depict the head of Christ, or of John the Baptist. This image is considered very similar to that found on the Turin Shroud which is reputed by some, to be that of the crucified Christ as he was prepared for burial. Also considered controversial for the time is that the image, if indeed it is of Jesus Christ, is the fact that there is no halo around the head of the man in the painting.

One of the inquisitions accusations against the Templars was that they worshipped heads, and this painting has also been assumed to represent that worship.

More prosaically, Templecombe was a sheep farm owned by the Templars, and four Templars were arrested at Templecombe, in 1308. Three were for a time imprisoned in the Tower of London.