

# Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon

## The Order of the Temple

### Founding of the order

In 1118 or 1119 Hugues de Payens and his relative Godfrey de Saint-Omer asked King Baldwin II of Jerusalem to form a monastic order to ensure the safety of Christians who made pilgrimages to Jerusalem following its capture in the first crusade. King Baldwin granted them space in the Al Aqsa Mosque, which was believed to have been built on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon, and therefore gained the name Solomon's Temple. From this the order became the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (The Templars).



*Image 1 Al Aqsa Mosque, Israel, where the Knights Templar were given space, also thought to be the site of the Temple of Solomon.*

The order had humble beginnings and started with just nine knights, and relied on donations, their emblem is two knights sharing a horse. Individual members were sworn to an oath of poverty. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, a nephew of one of the founding knights, spoke and wrote on their behalf and in 1129. The Roman Catholic Church officially endorsed the order at the Council of Troyes. This allowed them to become a favoured charity throughout Europe. In 1139 Pope Innocent II issued the papal bull 'Omne Datum Optimum' which exempted the order from being subject to local laws and taxes, allowing them free passage and were only under the authority of the Pope.



*Image 2 Exterior view showing image of two knights sharing a horse. London - Temple Church.*

## The templar code

The order was based on the Cistercians and devised a code of behaviour known today as the 'Latin Rule' with seventy-two clauses, which determined how the number of horses they could have, what they could wear, to take their meals in silence and to not eat meat more than three times a week. Over time the number of clauses increased to over six hundred.



*Image 3 Effigy of Gilbert Marshal, 4th Earl of Pembroke supporter of and supposed member of the Poor Knights of Christ and King Solomons Temple.. London - Temple Church, 1241. The effigy was severely damaged by WWII bombing.*

## The knights templar

Knights of the order wore white mantles, assigned to the Templars in 1129 at the Council of Troyes and surcoats quartered by a red cross, a symbol of martyrdom, probably added at the start of the Second Crusade in 1147, and were heavily armoured knights from the aristocracy with war horses. Knights had to wear their white mantles as all times, even when eating and drinking. Knights of the Order would never surrender unless the orders flag had fallen, and even then they should try and regroup with other Christian soldiers. They had a solemn initiation ceremony that outsiders were discouraged from attending that was to later cause mistrust in the order. New members generally joined for life and had to willingly hand over their wealth and goods to the order and took vows of poverty, chastity, piety, and obedience. Married men could join if they had their wife's permission, but they were not allowed to wear the white mantle, and occasionally knights were allowed to join for set periods of time.



*Image 4 Members of the Medieval Combat Society filming for a documentary on the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, 2008.*

Below the knights were sergeants who wore a black surcoat with a red cross and a black or brown mantle and were lightly quipped cavalry. Chaplains were ordained priests who looked after Templar spiritual requirements. Other members looked after its infrastructure which grew rapidly to large proportions, mainly through gifts of land from wealthy benefactors. They used their finances to build castles and fortifications throughout the Mediterranean and Holy Land, and to purchase further lands, farms, vineyards. They participated in manufacturing, import and export and even had their own fleet of ships.



Image 5 Interior view showing effigies of supposed members of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. London - Temple Church.

With this military strength, financial stability and their large wealth, the order developed a banking system in 1150 to ensure the safe transfer of money, by using encoded documents to note deposits of wealth the documents could be used to retrieve funds at the destination of travellers, making them less susceptible to robbery.



Image 6 Effigy of William Marshal. 1st Earl of Pembroke, who was initiated into the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon on his death bed. 1241. London - Victoria and Albert Museum, cast taken from Temple Church prior to bomb damage.

## The order loses its purpose

In the mid-12th century, the Muslims started to unite, and the Christian factions had internal fighting which weakened their positions. Two other Christian orders, The Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem (The Hospitallers) and The Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem (The Teutonic Knights) were at times at odds with the order. In 1185 the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Heraclius visited England and consecrated the Temple Church in London, it is thought that his aim was to gain support and unite the Christians. In 1172 Henry II, King of England had vowed to take the cross and go on a crusade. Henry II summoned a great council at Clerkenwell and gave Heraclius his answer: 'for the good of his realm and the salvation of his own soul' he declared that he must stay in England. He would provide money instead. Heraclius was unimpressed: 'We seek a man even without money - but not money without a man.'



Image 7 Seal of the Poor Knights of Christ showing horse carrying two knights.

Finally, Jerusalem fell in 1187, was retaken in 1229 but fell again in 1244. The order set up new headquarters in Acre, but that fell to in 1291, their strongholds of Tortosa and Atlit fell later, and the order were forced to move their headquarters again to Limassol on Cyprus. The Order did manage to keep a foothold on the island of Arwad, but this finally fell between 1302 and 1303. When the holy land was lost, they maintained their European possessions, but their original purpose had gone.



*Image 8 Members of the Medieval Combat Society filming for a documentary on the Poor Knights of Christ, 2008.*

Pope Clement V in 1305 wanted to discuss merging the order with the Knights of Saint John, but neither the Templar Grand Master Jacques Molay or the Hospitaller Grand Master Foulques de Villaret wanted this to happen. However, in 1306 the Pope summoned them both to discuss the idea in 1307. Charges of Heresy raised by a knight who left the order in 1305 were discussed by Jacques Molay and Pope Clement V and agreed to be unfounded, but Clement asked King Philip IV of France for help in investigating the charges.



*Image 9 Effigy of William Marshal the Younger. 2nd Earl of Pembroke, supporter of and supposed member of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, 1241. London - Victoria and Albert Museum, cast taken from Temple Church prior to bomb damage.*



*Image 10 Thirteenth Century effigy from the orders commandery at La Roche now in Poitiers Museum.*

## Arrest of the Templars

Philip IV, King of France was deeply in debt to the order and on Friday 13th October 1307 accused them of heresy and had their members arrested in France. Members of the order were tortured to obtain confessions of heresy. It is suggested this is where the superstition of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> being unlucky originated. The persecution of the order was a way to avoid paying back debts, and by confiscating further the orders assets Philip was able to make further money. Pope Clement under pressure from King Philip, then issued the bull 'Pastoralis Praeeminentiae' on November 22, 1307, instructing all Christian monarchs in Europe to arrest all members of the order and seize their assets.



*Image 11 Donjon du Coudray, Chinon, where the leaders of the Poor Knights of the Christ and the Temple of Solomon were held including Jacques De Molay.*

Pope Clement called for hearings run by the papacy to try members of the order and confessions given under torture were withdrawn. It was normal practice at that time to burn stake anyone who recanted their confessions of heresy as relapsed heretics, and so King Philip had members of the order burnt in Paris to force the proceedings along. A document found in the papal archives in 2001 known as the Chinon Parchment records the papal trials and shows that Pope Clement absolved the members of the order of all heresies in 1308. King Philip applied pressure to Pope Clement, even threatening military action and Pope Clement finally disbanded the order in 1312 at the Council of Vienne with the papal bull 'Vox in Excelsior' and the papal bull 'Ad Providam' which turned over assets of the order to the Order of Saint John.



*Image 12 Carvings at the Donjon du Coudray, Chinon made by members of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon while imprisoned.*

Jacques de Molay the grand Master of the Order and Geoffrey de Charney the Preceptor of Normandy both retracted their statements and declared guilty of being relapsed heretics. Both were burnt to death in Paris on 18th March 1314. Jacques de Molay is reported to have said that both Pope Clement and King Philip would soon meet him before God. Pope Clement died a month later, and before the end of the year king Philip died in a hunting accident.



*Image 13 Members of the Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon being burnt alive.*

The remainder of the Order of the Temple were either arrested and tried, absorbed into other military orders such as the Knights of Saint John, or allowed to live their lives out peacefully. Others fled to different countries, and in Portugal the order changed their name to the Knights of Christ.



*Image 14 Members of the Medieval Combat Society filming for a documentary on the Poor Knights of Christ, 2008.*

There are still sites today that are related to the order such as Temple Bar in London, Cressing Temple in Essex, and Templecombe in Somerset. Modern societies such as the Freemasons use symbols of the order or claim links to the Order. Controversy has been caused over the allegations of heresy, and links to the holy grail. The Shroud of Turin now thought to be a fake made between 1260 and 1390 was first publicly displayed in 1357 by the grandson of Geoffrey de Charney.



*Image 15 A knight of the Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon mounted on a warhorse with lance and shield.*

# Grand Masters of the Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon

## Seat of Jerusalem, Holy Land

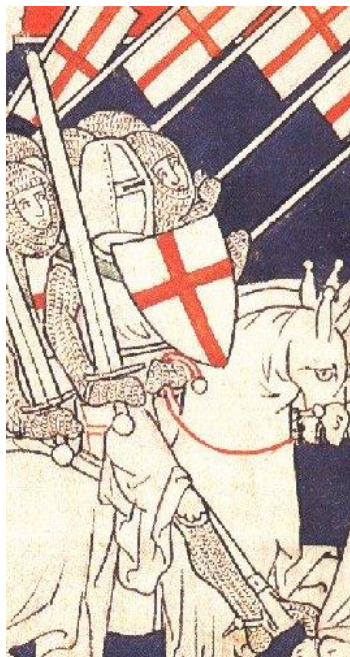
Hugues de Payens (1118-1136)  
Robert de Craon (1136-1147)  
Everard des Barres (1147-1149)  
Bernard de Tremelay - KIA (1149-1153)  
André de Montbard (1153-1156)  
Bertrand de Blanchefort (1156-1169)  
Philip of Milly (1169-1171)  
Odo of St Amand - POW (1171-1179)  
Arnold of Torroja (1181-1184)

## Seat of Acre, Holy Land

Gérard de Ridefort - KIA (1185-1189)  
Robert de Sable (1191-1193)  
Gilbert Horal (1193-1200)  
Phillipe de Plessis (1201-1208)  
Guillaume de Chartres (1209-1219)  
Peire de Montagut (1218-1232)  
Armand de Périgord - POW/KIA (1232-1244)  
Richard de Bures - Disputed (1244/5-1247)  
Guillaume de Sonnac - KIA (1247-1250)  
Renaud de Vichiers (1250-1256)  
Thomas Bérard (1256-1273)  
Guillaume de Beaujeu - KIA (1273-1291)

## Seat of Limassol, Cyprus

Thibaud Gaudin (1291-1292)  
Jacques de Molay (1292-1314)



*Image 16 Mounted knights of the Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon.*



# Timeline of the Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon

- 1099 - First crusade captures Jerusalem.
- 1118 - Order of Poor Knights and the Temple of Solomon founded.
- 1127 - Hugh de Payen and other knights return to France.
- 1127 - Bernard of Clairvaux writes the rules of the order (The Latin Rule) based on Cistercian tenants.
- 1127 - First donation of land to the order by Count Thybaud.
- 1127 - Hugh de Payens granted land for first Temple Church in Holborn, London.
- 1129 - The order is endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Troyes and given the white mantle.
- 1129 - The order is defeated at a battle in Damascus.
- 1130 - The order receives privileges from Alfonso I, King of Spain.
- 1139 - Pope Innocent II issues the papal bull 'Omne Datum Optimum' exempting the order from obedience to local laws.
- 1139 - The order is defeated again in Damascus.
- 1147 - Start of the second crusade. It is at this point the order probably gained their red crosses.
- 1148 - The order is defeated in Damascus for a third time.
- 1150 - The order begins use of letters of credit.
- 1153 - Siege of Ascalon. Grand master Bernard de Tremelay leads forty members of the order, but they are not supported by the rest of army and are surrounded and beheaded.
- 1154 - Grand Master Andre de Montbard superintended masons in England to build a temple and headquarters in Fleet Street, London
- 1177 - Battle of Montgisard. The order and the Kingdom of Jerusalem is victorious.
- 1184 - The army of Jerusalem and Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem is defeated, all surviving members of the order are executed.
- 1184 - The order moves its seat of power from Jerusalem to Acre.
- 1187 - Battle of Cresson Springs. The order is defeated.
- 1187 - Battle of Hattin. Jerusalem falls to Saladin.
- 1189 - Saladin beheads the orders grand master Gérard de Ridefort for breaking treaties.
- 1190-1191 - Siege of Acre. The city is captured, and the order is victorious.
- 1191 - Templars victorious at the Battle of Arsuf.
- 1218 - The order is defeated at Battle of Damietta.
- 1229 - Crusader army recaptures Jerusalem.
- 1244 - Khwarazmi Turks capture Jerusalem.
- 1249 - Battle of Damietta. The order is defeated.
- 1250 - The order is defeated at the Battle of Mansurah.
- 1263 - Prince Edward, the future Edward I, King of England enters the Temple Church in London and ransacks the treasury.
- 1271 - Prince Edward, the future Edward I, King of England leads a crusade and is saved from an assassin's poisoned blade by drugs supplied by the order.
- 1272 - The council of England meets at the Temple Church in London and drafts a letter to Prince Edward informing him of his accession to the throne.
- 1291 - Battle of Saphet. The order is defeated.
- 1291 - Siege of Acre. The order loses and the city falls.
- 1291 - The order moves its seat of power from Acre to Limassol, Cyprus.
- 1300 - The order attempts military actions from the island of Arwad without success.
- 1302/3 - The order loses the island of Arwad, their last foothold in the Holy Land.
- 1305 - The order is accused of heresy by a knight who had left the order.
- 1305 - Pope Clement V raises possibility of merging the Templars and the Hospitallers.
- 1306 - Pope Clement invites Templars and Hospitallers for discussions on merger.
- 1307 October 13 - Philip IV arrests members of the order across France.

1307 November 22 - Pope Clement issues papal bull 'Pastoralis Praeeminentiae', ordering arrest of members of the order across Europe.

1308 - Chinon Parchment shows papal trial absolved the order of heresy.

1310 - Philip IV, King of France orders members of the order who have recanted their confessions to be burnt alive.

1312 - At the Council of Vienne Pope Clement V issues the papal bull 'Vox in Excelso', dissolving the order, and 'Ad Providam', turning over their assets to the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem.

1314 March 18 - Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the order and Geoffrey de Charney, Preceptor of Normandy, burnt at the stake. Jacques de Molat declares that the Pope and King Philip will both meet him soon before God.

1314 April - Pope Clement V dies.

1314 November - Philip IV, King of France dies in a hunting accident.

(Please note, all sources cannot be verified)