



An address given by  
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(Provincial Sub-Prior of Lincolnshire)  
on the occasion of the Meeting of Great Priory  
in Lincoln Cathedral 1984

ELECTRONICALLY PRESERVED FOR PERPETUITY

I have been asked to explain something of the History of the Order and Lincolnshire. Let's begin with a Saint who has nothing to do with the Order, and yet whose murder was to have a profound effect, St. Thomas a Beckett, as a penance for whose murder Henry II promised to maintain 200 Templars at his own expense. In 1185, he met the Grand Master of the Knights Templar and the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John at Reading.

The Templars decided to move from Holborn and erected the building which bears the name of the Order; Heraclius Patriarch of Jerusalem consecrated the round portion of their new church.

From then on the Knights Templar began to flourish in England and like all human endeavours, their success made many enemies. Plot after plot was hatched to bring them down, but all failed until the unhappy combination of a weak Pope in Clement V and an unscrupulous King in Philip le Bel of France succeeded. On a given day, 12th October, 1307, 15000 persons, Knights and Sergeants, chaplains, artisans, labourers and other dependents were taken. How the intention was kept secret, many have argued ever since. The facts are that there was no struggle anywhere. The Knights were tortured and forced confessions obtained before many were executed, including the Grand Master Jacques de Moloy, who was burnt alive slowly on small pieces of charcoal.

A number were captured and imprisoned at Temple Bruer -just outside this city-and at other homes of the Order in the County. They were brought to Lincoln and incarcerated in the gate house at Claxlede, near the Bull's Head Inn.

They were then taken before the Bishop, John of Dolderby, in the Chapter House in 1310 on charges of apostacy, idolatry and gross immorality.

Just think for a moment of the absurdity of the charges - idolatry against those who fought in the sacred traditions of the Cross - who fought the infidel on his own ground - who gave their money and shed their blood for the truths of Holy Writ.

The truth was, of course, that the doom of the Knights Templar was pronounced long before the charges were even formulated.

As you sit in the quiet of this grand old Chapter House of Lincoln, the scene is enacted before you.

The Bishop sits in State surrounded by the dignitaries of the Cathedral. Before him, with haggard faces and broken limbs stand - no exist with just a hint of their old martial spirit - the Knights Templar. On the other side - behind at the back - the crowd gathered to give their lying evidence - and others, worse still, who after horrid tortures presented so called confessions.

What am I to say about the Bishop?

Did he know lie from truth and yet still condemn? Was he just deceived by the sheer volume of the so called evidence brought against the Knights - these unhappy men - these martyr Templars.

What we do know is that they were sentenced to life imprisonment in various monastic houses. Their church, their buildings, their gardens - the whole of their possessions passed into the hands of the Knights Hospitaller of St. John of Jerusalem.

Here in Lincolnshire, some 200 properties were in the possession of the Order of St. John at the time of the Dissolution by Henry VIII. Two of these sites are of special interest to us today. Temple Bruer, which was the gift of Robert de Everingham and is situated some 12 miles south of Lincoln.

Under the re-organisation of Prior Philip de Thame, Temple Bruer became a St. John Commandery of considerable importance. Here Henry VIII signed in 1538 the warrant for the execution of John, Lord Hussey, Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, for treason. If you want to see the helmet, gauntlets and spurs of this, the last Lord Hussey, they now hang on the Chancel wall of Caythorpe Church.

On a lighter note, Henry VIII is said to have dined at Temple Bruer with Catherine Howard in 1541 after the dissolution.

All that remains today is the square - three storied-tower of the Templar's round church. Some years ago, the Temple Bruer Preceptory held a meeting there.

The other notable site is that of the village of Eagle, about 8 miles South West of Lincoln.

The Manor of Eagle was given to the Templars by King Stephen, and in the following reign Henry II gave them the churches of Eagle, Swinderby and North Scarle. The preceptory itself was at Eagle Hall, about a mile from the village, but unfortunately nothing now remains of it.

However, when the properties came into the possession of the Knights Hospitaller, those at Eagle were given a very special position. It was made a large Commandery and was a prioral estate at the disposal of each Grand Prior during his rule, and was usually awarded as a personal acknowledgement of merit to a senior member of the English Langue. The office of Bailiff of Eagle was one of the Four Grand Crosses in England and ranked third in seniority below the Grand Prior.

In 1381, the Commandery of Eagle was raised to the dignity of a Bailwick and continued as such for 159 years until Henry VIII suppressed the English Langue of the Order in 1540.

The Grand Priory in England was revived in 1831 and though the Bailwick had long ceased to exist, the title of Bailiff of Eagle was revived in 1855 and continues to this day.

Let me end with the final plea of Jacques de Moloy outside Notre Dame.

*'It is only right that at so solemn a moment, and when my life has so little time to run, I should reveal the deception which has been practised and speak up for the truth.*

*Hear me; before Heaven and Earth and all of you for my witnesses, I confess that I am indeed guilty of the greatest infamy. But the infamy is that I have lied. I have lied in admitting the disgusting charges laid against my Order. I declare, and I must declare, that the Order is innocent. Its purity and saintliness have never been defiled. In truth I had testified otherwise, but I did so from fear of terrible tortures. Other Knights who retracted their confessions have been led to the stake, I know. Yet the thought of dying is not so awful that I would now uphold my confession to foul crimes which were never committed. Life is offered me, but at the price of perfidy. At such a price, life is not worth having. If life is to be bought only by piling lie up on lie, I do not grieve that I must lose.'*

JHA