

# CHINON PARCHMENT

I trust we are all aware that the suppression of the Order of Knights Templar on Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1307 was due to the avarice of the King of France, Philip IV, known as “The Fair” with the collusion of the then Pope, Clement V.

Some of you may also recall in late 2001, the press reported that the Roman Church had exonerated the order of Knights Templar and although the Order was not to be revived, the blame attached to them was not justified. At the time I could find little supplementary back ground to this press release, but in 2010, while on a visit to my younger daughter, and two of my grandchildren at the time living in East Lothian, I was dragged in Edinburgh, on a shopping trip. I managed to escape in to Walterstone’s bookshop on Princes Street, Edinburgh, where I came across a book entitled “The Templars – The Secret History Revealed”. At £7.99 I thought it was worth a go, and gave me a most satisfying read.

The author, Barbara Frale, M. A., an archivist, on the Vatican staff, had been engaged in the sorting, collating and maintaining the vast collection of documents held in the Vatican.

I have reduced her book of some 50 pages to this short talk, and I must offer the caveat that in a further reading on a somewhat different matter, but related to the Roman Catholic Church, I found that there is an organisation therein that exercises control over any printed material issued by or on behalf of the Church, so the information provided may have been “Doctored” to suit their ends.

So on with the talk - in September 2001 whilst working through the inventory of documents on the trial of the Templars, Barbara’s curiosity was aroused by the existence of a document relating to a diocesan inquest held in the Diocese of Tours, one of the many local hearings throughout the Christian world that Pope Clement V had ordered to be held so that the charge of heresy levelled against the Templars could be proved or otherwise. What excited her was that the hearing had been held under the direction of one Cardinal Fredol, and this was unusual for he was an eminent canon lawyer, a papal legate for the most delicate of diplomatic missions and a prominent member of the College of Cardinals. Why, she reasoned, would someone of his stature be required take

time away from the Vatican to attend a hearing in which was a provincial backwater on what one would have thought was a routine matter?

The document demanded, with this background, a more detailed examination. This revealed that Canon Fredol had been invested with the full power and authority of the Pope himself, to conduct the enquiry and that the accused was no less a person than the then Grand Master of the Order, Jacques de Molay. He had been incarcerated in the castle of Chinon together with several other senior members of the Order, expressly to prevent them meeting with the Pope.

Despite initially acting in close concert with Philip IV, Pope Clement V had eventually realised that the king's determination to suppress the Order was in reality his pressing need for funds to finance his war against Edward II and Templars' treasury was to provide a portion of the necessary capital.

The Pope was also aware that the King's agents had him under surveillance. A little deception was therefore called for. He decreed that the Papal Court would take their summer holiday and would retire from Rome to the country. The ruse worked for the Cardinal with his staff was able to travel to Chinon Castle without arousing any suspicion and start their hearing. Lesser dignitaries were also enjoined to conduct like enquiries throughout France. These were held to be held secret, hopefully to avoid any interference by the King of France.

On examination of this specific document, bearing the dates 17 to 20 August 1308 showed that the Cardinal had been most punctilious in his examination of the Grand Master. It contains precise details of the Order's initiation ceremony, which had in its time fuelled great scandals. Reading the confessions of these five eminent knights, their description of the Initiation ceremony varied little from that recorded in the written Statutes of the Temple dating back to the second half of the thirteenth century. However each knight's testimony varied somewhat, possibly it being their intention to lay false trails.

However, the principal details were consistent in that the recruit was examined by the senior officer in attendance (usually the Preceptor) and this examination required the candidate to confirm his acceptance of the rule and warned "Sir you see us well clothed and provided with the best horses, but very few know what our souls must withstand. If you become a Templar, you will have to face difficult challenges hear outrageous words and accept them with patience and obey your superiors no matter what they command you to do. Will you be able

to bear the unbearable?" To which the response was: "Sir with God's help I can bear anything." Then the Candidate recited the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience removed his lay garments and donned his Templar dress. Once the preceptor fastened the clasp of the mantle of Temple around the candidate's neck, he was a member of the Order in all respects. This was the end of the formal ceremony and all five of the prisoners' testimony confirmed this to be so. Thereafter the detail varied, but all acknowledged that the Candidate was taken to an isolated place and required to perform actions which included in every case spitting on or at the Cross, but this was to cover the eventuality of them having so to do if captured by the Saracens. The other actions were stated to obtain from the candidates absolute obedience, if the Candidate demurred, he was reminded that he had agreed to obey his superiors no matter what they commanded him to do. The confessions also admitted the kissing initiates, as an expression of Monastic Brotherhood.

Several of the confessions also acknowledged that there was the occasional case of sodomy, but where it had arisen had been always dealt with in accordance with the rule of the Order.

It is worthy of note that none of the actions that the Order was supposed to have indulged in, details of which had been obtained under torture, including the following: -

That upon admission to the Order they denied Christ.

That Christ was not the true God.

That Christ had not suffered for the redemption of mankind, nor had he been crucified!

That they did not accept the sacraments of the church.

That they worshipped a head, which had three faces!

That they worshipped a cat.

That they worshipped a calf's head.

These statements were all found to be spurious and were more than likely the fevered imagination of the torturers or of those wishing to belittle the Order.

It also identified that the King of France, Philip IV had been plotting for many years to engineer the downfall of the Order. The outcome of the enquiry was that the Grand Master and his colleagues were found to be innocent of all charges of heresy, in addition were absolved from the less serious charges of

apostolic authority and as a consequence were fully reintegrated in to the Catholic community. Thus the commonly held opinion that the Templars were heretics is swept aside and the Templars' absolute innocence has been finally determined.

Without doubt this document is genuine, the only fault, if there was one, is that it been erroneously catalogued in 1628 as a record of a trial in the diocese of Tours – factually correct for Chinon castle is in that diocese.

So what went wrong?

Pope Clement V, with his advisors had retired from the Vatican to work in the comparative sanctuary of the Abbey of Maucene, where they spent many weeks examining and reviewing all the Chinon and other documentary evidence that had been submitted from the many bishops who had conducted examinations of the Templars throughout France. We should be aware that at the time Pope Clement V owed his position largely due to the support of Phillip IV of France. Additionally he was terminally ill. He took therefore what can only be deemed to be the soft option – he dissolved the Order on 22 March 1312, but with the caveat that the members either join another Order, either The Hospitallers or The Teutonic Knights, or alternatively to take Holy Orders. At the same time he directed that all the Templar's property be passed to the Hospitallers. As a significant number of Templars were still being detained illegally by Phillip IV, Clement V hoped that this directive would guarantee their safety until they took up one of the options offered but in the interim he proposed they be held under house arrest under the custody of the church.

As a loyal and devoted servant of the Church the Grand Master repeatedly tried to gain an audience with the Pope to set aside the dissolution of the Order, but royal agents were able to keep him in isolation and without contact with any of the members of the Order. Thus the chances of any meeting with the Pope and his subsequent release were foiled.

Using their newly found status there were several attempts by a number of the more prominent Knights to discomfort the king, but it was futile for those who initiated the action somewhat mysteriously disappeared in to the Royal prisons, never to be seen or heard of again. With such a situation the remainder decided that discretion was the better part of valour and gave up the fight.

With a lapse of almost two years since the dissolution and something like seven years since he initiated his first actions, there being no positive movement the King early in 1314 pressed the Pope for a decision on the fate of the leaders, since only the Pope could issue a final judgement on their case. By now a ground swell in favour of the Templar leaders were beginning to pose a real threat to Philip IV, due to the fact that word of the hearing had been leaked and it was becoming common knowledge that Pope had absolved them of all charges and reconciled them into the Catholic community. At this stage although the Grand Master had not been able to obtain his freedom, he was successful in obtaining the services of a personal chaplain who was able to celebrate Mass and the conduct liturgical office in the Grand Master's cell on a daily basis.

The Pope's illness was becoming more critical, forcing him to take to his bed for days at a time, on several occasions being thought close to death. Physically unable himself to deal with the question of the Templars, the Pope created a commission of bishops to decide upon their fate, a somewhat pointless action as in reality, the decision had already been made. All that had to be done was to implement the decree of perpetual detention in the custody of the church, or another Order, a move that would ensure the safety of the leader's life and assure the King of France that the Order would never be revived

The Grand Master and one of his closest colleagues, the Preceptor of Normandy; Geoffrey de Charny however refused to accept this verdict of what was, in reality was to them, life imprisonment on a false charge. At the same time they again proclaimed the Temple's innocence of all charges brought against them and pressed for the reinstatement of the Order.

With this impasse, the bishops on the commission adjourned the hearing to consult the Pope. With the outcome uncertain, the King elected to follow a more drastic course of action that would, in his opinion, put the Templar question to an end once and for all. On the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1314, he had them seized from the legitimate custody of the commission. Rather than having them quietly executed, he unwisely determined to make a spectacular event of their end. Heretics were publicly executed by burning and this was the line of action he took. However he had misjudged the mood of the populace, who by this time had come to realise that Philip's motives were not all together altruistic. A mob gathered on the island in the River Seine where the execution was to take place, expressing their disquiet in no uncertain terms and had to be forcibly dispersed by the Royal Guard.

We know that the Grand Master exhibited great heroism at his execution, asked for his hands to be untied and with his eyes raised to heaven he prayed to the Virgin Mary, to whom the Order was dedicated, proclaiming his innocence and that of his fellow members and of their fidelity to the Christian faith.

He also called down the judgement of God upon Philip IV who had attacked the Order without warning and on Clement V who in the Grand Master's opinion had abandoned the Order. Clement died on April 20 a little more than a month after the execution and Philip IV several months later on November 29, thus giving rise to the legend of a curse which has existed to this day.

Popular opinion appears to have overlooked the issue of innocence, assuming, I imagine, that the final death penalty over ruled the Pope's decision. As to the other three knights, Hugues de Pairaud was alive in 1321 for he was interrogated, yet again, on the whereabouts of the Templars' vanished treasure but the record shows he was unable to offer any explanation as to its whereabouts, if indeed such treasurer did exist.

As to the other two there is no information as to what happened to them and it can only be surmised that they ended their days as either prisoners at Chinon Castle or took advantage of the Pope's offer and joined either the Hospitallers, or took Holy Orders.

Chinon Castle still exists, but in a ruinous state. However in the dungeons there are carvings left by the Templar prisoners some of which are similar to those to be found in the castles of Lincoln and Warwick.

There remains only one point which I think requires clarification, the rite which caused so much disquiet amongst the order's detractors. It was a special rite known as the "Passion of Christ" celebrated on Holy (or Maundy) Thursday in which the Templars received the communion only in the form of wine, or the Holy Blood of Christ, the drink of eternal life. Even to this day a significant number of the Catholic laity takes communion in the form of bread alone, the wine being reserved for the clergy. It was unique to the Templars; they apparently followed the ritual of a religious traditions practised in the city of Jerusalem, perhaps as far back as the early Christian era. This ritual is thought to be connected with the legend of the Holy Grail or the cup used by Joseph of

Arimathea into which he gathered the blood and water that flowed from Christ's side at his crucifixion.

In conclusion Barbara Frale stresses in the strongest terms that the Pope, Clement V formally dissolved the Order on the 22nd March, 1312, in his Papal Bull *Vox in excelso* (A voice from on High).

The Order of the Temple was a religious and military order. Its members were bachelors or widowers who took vows of celibacy, absolute obedience and total poverty to become soldiers who enlisted into a standing army. I would imagine that very few of you share these fundamental characteristics?

Furthermore the Order having been disbanded Pope Clement V in his Bull outlawed any attempt to resuscitate it without Papal consent, going so far as to excommunicate anyone who dared to use the name or the symbols of the Temple – so Brother Knights I am happy that you are joining me in a state of eternal damnation.

**VE Kt Frank David Simpson, PGt Registrar, 2017**