

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A KNIGHT TEMPLAR

Introduction and first reading – XX Knight

The Order of the Knights Templar has proved a point of interest to all and sundry over the years recently prompted by our local landmark, the recently restored Conisbrough Castle, used as a background for Scott's book, *Ivanhoe*, and of course Dan Brown's Book "The De Vinci Code," and its subsequent release as a film.

Having read both books and seen films based upon the stories, it is abundantly clear that while novelists and film makers speculated on the wealth of the Order, their relation with the ladies of the day, often dressed in garments which left little to the imagination, the secrecy imposed by the Order, their prowess in battle and the care taken in guarding the pilgrims travelling to and from the Holy City, virtually nothing has been published on the mundane day to day life of the Knights. Hopefully this talk will in some way redress this oversight.

As I am sure you are all aware the Order as a fighting force maintained a tenuous control for just over 160 years on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean based upon the holding some 40 plus castles. This period of occupation was not in the face of continuous battles, but rather a series of skirmishes, with intermittent major clashes. At the same time they were developing and maintaining agricultural holdings, around these castles as they needed to feed themselves, their staff and naturally their horses and other animals.

However the occupation of the Holy Land came to an end when they were driven from their final beach head at Acre in 1291, retiring to Cyprus followed by the ignominious end – the eventual dissolution of the Order by Philip the Fair of France assisted by Pope Clement 5th in October 1305.

It goes without saying that when they were not engaged in fighting, they had other duties to devote themselves to. Those of us who have been involved in military service will be well aware that a significant part of the time when not in action was spent in the very necessary, but never the less boring duties, known to those who suffered as "Bull". To the uninitiated this was in fact training in the use of our weapons, cleaning and maintaining them together with the development of tactics in their use. It is a truism that there is nothing new in military circles.

Second Reading – XX Knight

The Order was, as I am sure you are aware, founded by Hugh de Paynes, in 1119 but without any formal constitution. Some six years later, in 1125, de Paynes secular overlord Hugh de Champagne joined the Order. A man of intellect, he very soon realised that formal administration was required if the Order was to survive and indeed grow. Hugh de Champagne had established a monastery at Clairvaux and its Abbott, Bernard, a cleric of substantial ability, later he was canonised, was instructed in 1128 to create a constitution for the Order. It does not require much imagination to appreciate that a monk would draft rules based upon his own knowledge and experience. So it followed that the Order became primarily monastic.

Initially there were seventy two articles, covering every situation from general religious duties to the Knights' diet. They followed broadly the rule of a Cistercian house, which at that time was most austere. The Knights were to pray together at appointed times each day, and should they be absent from the house they were to say a specified number of Paternosters (The Lord's Prayer). They were to eat meat only three times a week, meals were to be taken in strict silence, with a reading from the Scriptures. At night, in the dormitories, silence was to be observed as well.

One of the major pleasures available to the nobility, hunting, was forbidden to the Knights, other than for lion, on the basis that the thrill of the chase was too close to the sinful pleasures of day to day life.

But if hunting was a sin, contact with women was infinitely worse and I quote; ***“The company of women is a perilous thing, for through them the ancient demon denied us the right to live in paradise; and therefore women may not be received in to the Order. We believe it is dangerous for any religious man to look too much at women's faces and so none of you should presume to kiss a woman, neither widow, not maiden, nor mother, nor sister, nor aunt, nor any other woman; therefore the knights of Christ must always flee from woman's kisses.”***

Strong stuff you may think, but then the brothers were also forbidden to act as Godparents. Upon reflection this supposed misogyny was to separate the knights from any form of family life, other than that provided by the Order. Further on in the Rule it is declared that children are forbidden to enter the

Order, as was common at that time in other monastic communities. It is apparent that from the beginning the Order was determined to accept only mature men who had offered themselves for service of their own wish and conviction.

Clothing was also closely determined by the Rule: the knights were not to wear old or undistinguished clothing, but as benefited warriors who had given themselves to a “True life for God” they should dress uniformly in white as an emblem of chastity and purity. The robes were not to have any superfluity or pride about them and no brother should wear any fur, other than sheepskin. To emphasise that direction on clothing the Rule continues with the statement as follows: **“.... so that the eye of gossiping envious should have nothing to criticize – the robes should be neither too short nor too long and if any brother through pride or bravado should covert a better or more beautiful robe let him be given the vilest of all.”**

As to night time, they slept on a straw mattress, covered with a sheet and two blankets. The Knights slept wearing their cotton under clothes, gathered with a belt, and a night light was left burning all through the hours of darkness.

The rule decreed that all property was held in common, so the brethren had no personal possessions. Should a Brother receive a gift, it had to be passed to the Master of the Preceptory and was deemed to be the property of the Order.

The Knights were not permitted to adorn their lances with pennants and jewellery was forbidden on their armour. The knights were not to indulge in excessive talking or laughter, instead poverty; chastity and humility were the rule.

Thus the Rule created and enforced a communal way of life, a total abrogation of the individual in favour of a corporate Order.

As it is now with regulations, it was then; the seventy two articles proved inadequate, by the time of the dissolution in 1305, almost 200 years later, some six hundred articles had been added to the Rule. Many were trivial and a substantial number were devised solely to meet a passing circumstance.

Thus this was an ordered society, governed by a rule for practically every eventuality.

Third Reading – XX Knight

So turning to the daily routine – and all members of the Order were bound by it, the Knights, their Sergeants, the term their armoured servants were known by and the domestic staff were all awoken by the ringing of a bell at four o'clock. Those Knights who were serving in the colder climes were permitted an extra two hours in bed; their call was six o'clock in the winter. They arose, and put on their tunics, dispensed with washing or shaving and went straight to the Chapel to hear Matins said, followed immediately by the services of Prime, Terce and Sext. In a Monastery these services would be said at 2.00 am for Matins, Prime at day break, Terce at 9.00 am and Sext at Midday. In this manner the Order rolled up the morning Monastic duties into one, for although they were warriors, they were also Monks and could not neglect the duties relating to that aspect of their life.

Following the conjoined service, they immediately adjourned to the stables to tend to their horses, a most necessary task for these animals were their only mode of transport and without them they could not function as a fighting force.

This duty having been satisfactorily accomplished then followed a review of their weapons and armour, with cleaning, repairing and sharpening as necessary. Once they were satisfied that all was well in that department, a training session in warfare followed, utilising the standard weapons of the day, the iron headed lance, the mace, sword, dagger and shield. It must be obvious that they had to be proficient with all these items, for their lives and those of their colleagues in arms were wholly dependent upon them being able to use them to the best advantage.

Time to break their fast would be late morning, but often early afternoon when they would assemble in the refectory, at a plain wooden table, on a bench, equipped with a bowl, cup, spoon and knife. The meal would be taken in strict silence, other than a reading of an appropriate text from the Bible by a Brother Knight or the Preceptory's Priest, were he available. To maintain the silence and avoid breaking the continuity of the reading, requests for an item were made using signs which developed over the years into a comprehensive language of its own.

The diet of the Knights was plain, varying, of course, according to where the Knights were based. For those in England, it is recorded that they ate wheaten

bread, pottage (pea or bean soup), broth, meat pies, vegetables in the form of Onions, Leeks, Peas, & Beans, Fruit such as apples, pears, plums and various nuts, eggs, game birds, rabbit, fish and pork. Potatoes & Sugar were unknown, as were many of the Mediterranean fruits, although they would be available to those based in Italy or upon the southern coast of Spain or France or that of Palestine and Syria. The only sweetener available was Honey and to drink there would be Ale, alternatively wine in the Continental Preceptories. The sumptuous feasts portrayed in films allegedly of that time would not be known, other than on very rare occasions when possibly some person of high standing was being entertained. The cattle used were producers of milk, which would be drunk, with any surplus being converted in to butter or cheese to provide food over the winter, any surplus cattle were slaughtered in the autumn as there would not be sufficient fodder to feed stock, other than that required for breeding in the following year. As the cattle were also used a draught animals, by the time they were slaughtered the meat would be tough and fit only for mince (hence Mince Pies) or broth. Sheep were kept for their wool and ewes for their milk. Again by the time they were killed the meat of the table would not really be fit to eat as a joint, but would be reduced to mince, a stew, broth or some style of pie. Pork was available, but only in the northern areas. As there was no refrigeration, the meat was preserved in some way, salted or precooked to keep it over the winter. Thus from the pig the preceptory cook would produce a variety of dishes, such as brawn, and various types of sausages which would available to vary the diet over the winter.

Following the midday meal, the Knights would return to their training and working with the horses. Late afternoon would see a return to the Chapel to hear the offices of None and Vespers, these services in a Monastery being held at 3.00 pm and early evening, but as in the case of the morning services they also were run together. After the evening service a further simple meal was provided followed by prayers, a blessing and then to bed.

In all, not too dissimilar to the calm and peaceful routine of a well ordered monastery. However, as one may well expect, not every member of the Order with a preceptory or a Castle would be available to attend Chapel at the appointed time, as required by the rule, for their duties would require them to be elsewhere. In such cases they were expected to recite the Paternoster for the period of the service. Those excused would obviously the Knights and Sergeants on guard or sentry duty, together with the staff whose domestic duties

were such that they could not readily leave them such as the smith shoeing a horse and having a hot shoe in the forge, or the baker in the midst of a baking session.

Having dealt with the duties of the day, it must be realised that in an organisations so bound by rules, obedience to them was paramount, again those who have served will be well aware of this situation. Infringements of the rule had to be dealt with, those of a more serious nature calling for strict attention to the requirements of the rule.

Fourth Reading – XX Knight

A full meeting of the Knights in the Preceptory was required each week in formal chapter, customarily on a Sunday, following the morning service, exigencies of the Order permitting. The meeting was held in the Chapel, failing this in the principal room of the Preceptory. It was required that such meeting would occur when four or more Knights were available. The Knights assembled with their Sergeants and the house servants. The Rule prescribed that upon entering the room, if it was the Chapel would genuflect before the Altar, recite the Paternoster, and then advance to their stalls removing their caps and coifs before taking their seat. The rule stated that the elderly or bald brethren were permitted to continue to wear their coifs, if it was cold and they so wished. The Master, or in his absence the senior brother present would then deliver a sermon, full of moral and spiritual injunctions.

Following this the assembly was then be opened to hear confessions and accusations. The confession could not be of a spiritual nature, for that would have required a priest to hear them, not in public but in private. The confession was a voluntary acceptance of the Knight's rule breaking or misdeeds. These were usually dealt with leniently, but not so in the case of one Brother making an accusation against a fellow Knight. In such a case the defaulter was made to leave the room and his case debated in secrecy. If it were a minor misdeed, the punishment would be in the nature of a short fast, a period on light diet, or possibly extra duties. A more serious crime could attract up to a year's degradation in which the brother found guilty lost his right to the wearing of the distinctive mantle. The rule did not specify what punishment was to be attributed to minor crime rather that the Knights in council were to use their discretion. However, the rule did specify ten serious crimes as follows – Simony, (that is seeking preferment in exchange for cash, goods or services), larceny,

sodomy, heresy, conspiracy, treason, murder of a Christian, revealing the secrets of the Order, retreating from fewer than three enemies, and leaving the house other than by the gate. In the event of a brother being found guilty of any of these crimes, then he was required to come before the entire Chapter, wearing only his breeches, be flogged and then expelled from the Order.

The business of the Chapter having been completed it would be closed by a valedictory blessing by a priest, if in attendance, otherwise by the Master, and a reminder would be made indicating that the misconduct for which no confession had been given had not been pardoned.

For those Knights serving in the Holy Land, in the periods between action against the Muslims the knights would be required to assist in maintaining civil order, and ensuring that the local populace accounted for the taxes due to the Lords based in the castles in the form of levies on occupiers of the agricultural holdings, dues on the markets and on the goods being landed at and exported from the ports on the Mediterranean coast.

As to those knights who had passed beyond the age when they were fit for active duty or were unable to fight due to an injury or illness they were retired to manage one of the numerous estates owned by the Order in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Scotland or England. Obviously on these estates there was no need to maintain a high state of readiness for war so their armour and weapons were no longer of paramount importance and their time was concentrated on the duties of a quartermaster or estate manager. The management of these estates was a major enterprise, as an example the Templar holding at Temple Hirst, close to Selby was at the time of the suppression of the Order in 1307 was some 1000 acres (just over 446 hectares) and even by today's standards is no small farm. The estates provided a supply of horses to replace those lost in action. The produce produced on the holdings, principally wool and corn from these islands and wines from the continent were traded to provide cash income to finance the cost of the war in the Holy Land.

As to those Knights who were based in the Templar Preceptory within a large town they would have the responsibility for providing a secure place for valuables – many of the town's people and nobility entrusted their property to the knights, which enabled them in conjunction with their substantial income from the estates they owned to provide a rudimentary banking service. Considerable sums of money were involved, as an example, in the reign of King

John, he wished to buy the support of a French nobleman, and contracted to pay the Count of Eu, in Normandy, the sum of 30,000 livres, the transaction he entrusted to the Order. A livre is an obsolete unit of French currency, approximately equal to an English Mark and this is deemed to be worth about 13/4d (67p decimal) – and a rough conversion equates to about £20,000. In today's terms you may think not a large amount, but a substantial sum when in 1214 a farm worker's weekly wage would average about 1/8 (decimal 8p) I would suggest that in today's terms we would be looking at something approaching £37.5 million. I have no doubt that there would be a significant number of Knights involved in maintaining the security of these funds as well as being committed to escort funds to and from the depositors. There are also records of Knights being on detached duties, acting as couriers, and escorting diplomats or prominent people to and from meetings.

These retired Knights would also be acting as recruiting officers for the casualties in the field of battle were substantial so a constant supply of replacements was necessary to maintain an effective fighting force in the Holy Land. As to their off duty time, such as it was, the rule forbade games of chance with cards as was surprisingly chess. However providing they did not gamble on the outcome they were permitted to play hopscotch or knuckles.

Such was the day in the life of a Knight, with very little time for leisure, being fully occupied with the necessary duties of a fighting monk, an estate manager, banker or courier.

Things did change, for having been driven out of the Holy Land in 1291, and the chance of ever returning being none existent, the whole reason for the Order evaporated, as did the need to maintain the severe regime of the Rule. An atmosphere of latitude developed, resulting in the strict monastic rules slipping away and eighteen years later the Order was so weakened that Philip the Fair of France and Pope Clement V were able to crush the Order in 1307, but that is another talk!

Fifth Reading – XX Knight

I trust Brethren you now have some idea of the life of a serving knight in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – somewhat different even to the life of an active service man today, but it turned out tough fighting men who made an impression which exists and excites even to this day.

The material which provided the substance of this paper was gleaned from the following books: -

Addison's Knights Templar 1842

The Piebald Standard – Edit Simon 1959

The Templars – the Secret History revealed – Barbara Frale – 2009

Secret Societies – Nick Harding – 2005

Military Religious Orders of the Middle Ages – F. C. Woodhouse – 1879